

Jesus
for a digital age

Muzi Cindi

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DEDICATION

For my Father Elias Mahlaba Cindi (1926-2001) who never imposed his religion on me but advised me to check The Rosicrucian mystical path. It was only in my fifties that I awakened to the mysticism my father was guiding me to.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

*Heresy is the youth of truth.
 Orthodox is descript old age.
 Heresy is thought.
 Orthodoxy is habit
 Heresy is initiative.
 Orthodoxy is inertia
 Heresy is self satisfied and intolerant of orthodoxy.
 Orthodoxy is equally self satisfied and intolerant of heresy.
 The orthodox should think better of heretics.
 And the heretics should think better of the orthodox.
 For every orthodoxy was once a heresy.
 And every heresy is fated to be an orthodoxy.
 All countries were founded by traitors.
 All our churches were founded by heretics.
 The patriotism of today glories in the treasons of yesterday.
 In our churches we bend the knee in cushioned prayer,
 To saints who were once dragged before
 The tribunals of the orthodox and condemned,
 And hung for their belief or unbelief
 Half of us are heretics.
 The other half worship heretics.
 Not even the orthodox worship the orthodox.
 Every orthodox faith is founded on some old time heresy.
 The men who conform to the old
 Never win immortal palms*

Author unknown

FOREWORD

It gives a great pleasure to introduce Muzi Cindi to our emerging universal world of consciousness readers. His pioneering spirit and theological genius has been confined largely to South Africa, his home. Muzi was one of the Pastors who used to frequent my meetings in the early 80's when I visited South Africa under the banner of the word of faith movement. In 2007, He had an awakening that ushered him into universal consciousness; we then reconnected again under the banner of expanded consciousness. Muzi is playing a very important pioneering on our universe that is now waking up from its deep sleep. As you read this very-very controversial book, consider the following about the United States of America:

- Fewer people going to church these days, especially younger ones called "Millennial Generation". These are teenagers and Twenty-something (18 – 29 year old). They're also called Generation Y. My children belong to this group. Research has shown that 90% of people in the Millennial Generation are very active on Social Networks in America.
- Less than 20 percent of all Americans are actually attending church on any given Sunday. In other words, more than 80 percent of Americans are finding more fulfilling things to do on weekends. The USA is following right on the footsteps of Europe in abandoning religiosity in favor of authentic spirituality. Europe is battling with their lost God while America battles the American God.
- Somewhere between 4,000 and 7,000 churches close their doors every year. Southern Baptist researcher Thom Rainer, in a recent article entitled "13 Issues for Churches in 2013," puts the estimate higher. He says between 8,000 and 10,000 churches will likely close this year.
- Between the years 2010 and 2012, more than half of all churches in America added not one new member. Each year, nearly 3 million more previous churchgoers enter the ranks of the "religiously unaffiliated."

The spiritual curiosity and fascination in religion has disappeared, due to stagnation, ritual, tradition and sleep-walking "saints"

(believers). Millions experience more transformation and inspiration from drugs, secular music, including rock concerts and parties along with sports than they do the typical, rote styles or staleness of the services anymore. Music and talent on *The Voice* or *American Idol* seem more "anointed," or at least gifted, than many church services these days. My rants, if that's what you want to call my posts, are to admonish and encourage all of us to reconsider and revisit our entrenched beliefs, and why we believe them, not only about God, the bible, church and even Jesus, but about ourselves as we relate to such things, if indeed we (you) do anymore or as you once did. I love community, spiritually and socially, but does going to church have the same appeal to you it once did, or did it ever spiritually?

Just over two thousand years ago Jesus Christ began a radically inclusive movement in which people's individuality and freedom were paramount. Jesus questioned conventional wisdom regarding religion, ritual and identity and he sought to affirm those who felt alienated and marginalized. Jesus had a way of recognizing the divine within all people, and was concerned primarily with wholeness and authenticity. He was concerned that people should be fully expressed individuals and be recognized as such, owning and honoring their truths. In the spirit of Christ's teaching I personally believe that a truly progressive Church or spiritual community should be inclusive of all people, so that we can provide a spiritual home for a variety of people in an increasingly diverse and evolving society. In respect of this, I feel it necessary to promote a truly broad church (spiritual collective), which is able to hold a diversity of views and traditions, or else I fear it runs the risk of becoming completely irrelevant to all but a select and dying few.

"Spirituality means waking up. Most people, even though they don't know it, are asleep. They're born asleep, they live asleep, they marry in their sleep, they breed children in their sleep, they die in their sleep without ever waking up. They never understand the loveliness and the beauty of this thing that we call human existence. You know, all mystics—Catholic, Christian, non-Christian, no matter what their theology, no matter what their religion—are unanimous on one thing: that all is well, all is well. Though everything is a mess, all is well. Strange paradox, to be sure. But, tragically, most people

never get to see that all is well because they are asleep. They are having a nightmare". – Said, Anthony De Mello

As cultural creative-s, and spiritual progressives of what we like to call "Expanded Consciousness" our objective in preaching, posting and writing the things we do is to help people awaken to their powerful inner strengths and intrinsic good or "God-ness"; apart from entrenched religious stagnations which seem to be the most spiritually debilitating habits of human culture and consciousness. People are not so much blind as blind folded by hyper fear based theologies that literally paralyze their souls.

Our English word soul, is the Greek word *psuche*, from which we get our English words, psyche or psychology, (the logic of thought or thinking). Thoughts are powerful, they are both creative and inventive. What we think about, we bring about. The Universe doesn't judge us so much by what we feel, but by what we think about what we feel and what we think about, what we think about, what we feel.

Wayne Dyer wrote: "When we change the way we look at things, the things we look at change."

The awakening has begun and there is a global shift in thinking and in new ways of being. You don't have to abandon your religious mooring, just transcend them, so they no longer define or confine your essence or essential being. We miss so much of our personal freedom, power and global comradely by segregating our "gods" into competitive models, modes and modalities.

Can you perceive God without fear, dogma, judgment and even doctrine? Can the ultimate reality we call God be experienced and expressed beyond institutional religious structuring? I believe "IT" not only can, but must; in order for us to experience our fuller inner valour and virtues as humanity. Reviewing and revising our traditional image of God is critical to the collective advancement of the human race. Jesus in a Digital Age, is a marked beginning to that revision and will help you reform and rearrange what you believe about you, why you believe that about you and how those beliefs (about you), add to or subtract from the quality of your life experience.

Before followers of Christ were called Christians they were called: "People of the Way". According to scripture, (Acts 11:26), they were first called Christians at Antioch. The term Christians at that time; was a reference to a new cult group of maverick Jews who, like the Samaritan Jews were interpreting what being "Chosen people of God" spiritually more than legally or culturally meant. In many circles the debate continues today.

Religious segregation and animosity remains one of the most volatile ancient, as well as present threats to the human race on this planet. These vicious and often violent divides are the result of ignorance and arrogance and mostly ignorance, which leads to arrogance. Arrogance is having or revealing an exaggerated sense of one's own importance or abilities. Religions do that a lot.

Ignorance is not always just lack of knowledge; it is ignoring what is obvious. Deep in all our hearts there are the remaining and extrinsic "voice mails of the soul" that millions refuse to check or acknowledge. In computer or cell phone lingo, when your mailbox is full, that means you are not receiving messages and can't receive new ones. It is not that the messages aren't there, they just haven't been heard, seen or read and thus important information is being missed or forfeited.

The digital age involves or relates to the use of computer technology. A computer is an electronic device for storing and processing data. Technology is the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes. In this modern "Information Age" we live in, knowledge is transcending faith. Faith is what you believe and hope for, knowledge is what you experience and remember inwardly. Knowledge is embedded in the soul. It is not learned, but recovered. As spirit being and spiritual humans, we came to the planet and plane of consciousness with everything we'll ever need to work and walk out our destiny and divinity. Those who call themselves people of faith are now having to bridge science and spirituality in a way religious traditions and fundamentalists have always resented and resisted. It will be those, who not only have faith, but who experience themselves, their won souls as a higher level of encounter and release.

This age is being called the Age of Enlightenment. Enlightenment was originally a European intellectual movement of the late 17th and 18th centuries emphasizing reason and individualism rather than tradition. The present enlightenment includes the action or state of attaining or having attained spiritual knowledge or insight, particularly, that awareness which frees a person from stagnation of self and soul and causes realization and actualization of ones Essence. Your essential self is your permanent rather than accidental self. It is the Self you chose as well as is chosen by Creation to be, in contrast to the self many accidentally become. Accidents generally don't happen by chose, but by chance. Far more people live and feel victims to accidental and 'chance' lives than essential and chosen or elected ones.

Are you a recovering addict to religion, fear based theologies, unreasonable dogma? This book will help you break your habit. As the author writes in his preface, there is indeed a growing group of people who consider themselves, "recovering fundamentalist Christians" who have the feeling that Christianity at its core; has something good to offer the human race, but as an institution, they no longer fully relate to it in consciousness. Their spiritual needs are no longer met in church as they once were or at least seemed to be. They feel confused as to what to do with their love and respect for Jesus, their appreciation of their experience of and in the Holy Spirit, and what to do with their bible and how to progressively interpret it while not idolizing it or their interpretations of it. They have friends who are not professing Christians but who seem to have more of the spirit of Christ than most of their Christian friends and church members do. It seems the church is full of right answers to wrong questions! Are you one of this growing group of evolving souls?

In my book, *God Is Not A Christian, Nor Jew, Muslim Hindu, God lives in us, around us, as us*, I have a chapter titled: "What You Want Wants You, because What You Want *IS* You" and I open it this way: The loneliest moment in your life is not when you loose friends, family or things. You are most lonely when you are away from, unaware of, or missing part of yourself....your own soul. You are most lonely and depressed when you have lost your essence or forgotten who you are. Because of this or our spiritual amnesia, we have

become transient souls, all but spiritual vagabonds seeking our own Self, our forgotten Self, the one we somehow and somewhere mislaid or misplaced and in some cases, replaced with the impostor. Eckhart Tolle says in his book, *A New Earth*: "In the seeing of who you are not, the recognition of who you are, emerges".

Being born again, in the broader and less religious sense, is awakening to your authentic, or original self, recovering that beautiful pure essence, working and walking it out. Many of you are on your way to enlightenment. Let's meet there together in consciousness. Its all good; cause it's all God! Dale Carnegie said: "Any idea that is held in the mind, that is emphasized, that is either feared or revered, will begin at once to clothe itself in the most convenient and appropriate form available" We must all begin to seriously question our beliefs and find the knowledge that transcends faith (beliefs, convictions or things you are convinced or a victim to). Beliefs create facts whether true or false.

There is a knowledge, (knowing) that transcends belief or faith. Scripture says, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen. How long will you hope in blindness, never really seeing what you're believing for? Hope is not bad, but it can be limiting. Knowing doesn't come from learning, it comes from remembering! Remembering who, that and how we are.

The Jesus factor is allowing ourselves the pleasure of recovery as well as discovery. In many ways the resurrection concept was more about us as individuals re-awakening to our original and authentic selves, than about Jesus leaving an empty tomb. It is about all of us leaving our white washed tombs of dead and dying theologies and rises to the new challenge of our evolving world. We are talking here about history, but mystery, the other side of natural time continuum. *Our best and next is yet to come!*

Carlton Pearson

April, 2014

PREFACE

A religion is as much a progressive unlearning of false ideas concerning God, as it is the learning of true ideas concerning God.

Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan

I begin the preface of my fourth book with a pre-emptive apology, like I did with the other three. All my books are now available on my website for a free download (www.muzicindi.net). It is not my purpose to offend anyone. I regret any offence this book might cause to religious people. The purpose of this book is to give my personal input on the current global awakening sweeping the universe. This book looks at the ramifications of the end of the Christian age. What sort of life can we expect after the collapse of traditional Christianity? It is my thesis that *Christendom is giving way to new cultural realities, including widespread secularism and religious pluralism*. We are coming to the end of the global supremacy of the Christian west. We are even seeing the collapse of traditional Christianity. We are coming to the end of the Christian Age and find ourselves on the threshold of a Global Age.

We all desire an exclusive possession of Jesus. Fundamentalists want to won Jesus for the exclusive separation theology. Liberals build a liberal theology around Jesus. Socialists promote socialism through the teachings of Jesus. Moslems want Jesus as their prophet. Atheists love Jesus for his atheism to an obsolete understanding of the Holy. Agnostics use Jesus as an example that the best of us get things wrong. We New Agers want Jesus as our ascended Master who is one with galaxies that never slumber nor sleep.

History has a way of repeating itself. I say more about this in chapter 10, the chapter on Tomorrow's God. On that chapter I give a portrait on how the birth of Theism was regarded as "atheism" by the followers of polytheistic gods in both the Israelite and Greek traditions. On 03 January 1521, Martin Luther was declared a heretic and expelled from the institutional church. Catholic defenders of the status quo judged Luther's Reformation as the rebellion of the human spirit against divine will. They said that the Reformation, if not stopped, could be the end of Christianity in its orthodox form. Yesterday's heresy is today's orthodoxy. Today's heresy is tomorrow's orthodoxy.

We are now truly entering a post-Christian world and a global village. In the emerging Global Age, we will not live by bread alone but by the love, compassion and goodwill that we can show to all human beings. We are experiencing the end of an age and the birth of a new age. Much of what Christianity has long taken for granted is disappearing: the security from beliefs and dogma; the Christian way of interpreting reality; the belief that only the Christian path leads to eternal salvation; and the belief that the Christian doctrine embodies the essential and unchangeable truths by which to live. All these are passing away and being replaced by new vocabulary that we create as we make our new path. Judaism was birthed from a cultural stream of animism merged into polytheistic gods. Christianity was birthed from Judaism as a continuation of the stream. The next kind of Christianity will be a continuation of the stream flowing from Christianity and its past. This time, it will be A Christianity without the orthodoxy of dogma, beliefs, and creeds.

The end of Christendom could be the beginning of something more nearly like the church – the disciple community described by the Scriptures and treasured throughout the ages by prophetic minorities. To grasp this opportunity, however, we must relinquish our centuries-old ambition to be the official religion, the dominant religion, of the dominant culture. We must disengage ourselves from our society if we are going to re-engage our society at the level of truth, justice, and love. We must stand off from the; “our tradition is the right one” culture with which we have been consistently identified; rediscover our own distinctive foundations and the ethical directives that derives from them; and allow ourselves, if necessary, to become exiles from our own tradition.

I write from inside my head; just like each and every writer. We cannot get outside of our heads to know and proclaim absolute truth. In this sense, I write what only myself can write. I’ve now discovered that I’m most powerful when I’m truly and authentically myself. I’ve entered the second half of my spiritual journey and no longer care how people validate my beliefs or lack of beliefs. I no longer need anyone’s approval to be myself and to write what I like. Like my Spiritual Teacher, Byron Katie, says it so well, “*I need your approval, only when I have it, not before.*” To use Bishop Carlton

Pearson's favourite line; - "*We don't have to go along to get along and that we can mind many of the same things without necessarily having the same mind about everything*".

After reading through thousands of books over the past years, I've now come to understand that the preface is the most important part of the book, as it entails the gist of the contents. As the title suggests, this book is about sharing my personal understanding of Jesus, who I see as being FOR this current Digital Age we are all in, instead of AGAIST. Humanity is right now, right here, undergoing the greatest spiritual awakening humanity has ever experienced. This awakening will make all other reformations look like a Sunday school picnic. We are right on the threshold of the greatest shaking the human population has ever experienced. This book will definitely shake all of your childhood beliefs about Jesus. It is my prayer that it will finally be an answer for you, to the question Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say I AM?". This is a question that has absorbed the Christian Church as well as Judeo-Christian path for a very long time. This book is a sequel to the one I released in May 2010, *The Second Coming of Christ*. In that book I formed a thesis that Jesus was an extraordinary Jewish teacher who showed some originality, rather than a divine figure. Jesus was a man of his own time, his own Jewish past of apocalyptic thinking, and not the centre of history; we need to go beyond the Jesus story. It is for this reason that I've demythologized our time as *The Second Coming of Christ*. Not the Christ of dogma and beliefs, but what we see happening around us. Dr. Robert Funk has suggested that God, Jesus and The Bible be dethroned (See Chapter 23).

God loves the world. God is for the world, not against it. God loves the world with eternal love, because God is love and only love. God will never leave the world behind to burn. God gave Jesus to the world. The Christian Church hijacked Jesus and formed an exclusive and egotistical religion out of the person of Jesus. My purpose in this book is to rescue Jesus and snatch him away from the Church and give Jesus back to the world that God loves. There is a new humanity rising in the universe as you read this. This new humanity is unconditionally loving; first to itself and to the other.

A NEW HUMANITY EMERGING

This book is about Our New Way of Being In our New Earth. This New Way of Being will be happening on Social Networks. Humanity is now fully entering a Global Scientific and Digital Age. Millions of people are leaving behind their primitive beliefs in: Angels, Demons, Satan, Spirits, and a three-tiered Universe of Heaven above, Hell below our Earth. There's a huge exodus going on in the Universe right now. Millions of people are deserting Churches that have enslaved them in Biblical Literalism and Fundamentalism for the past one hundred years since the promulgation of Five Fundamentals. There's an Abrahamic generation that is leaving behind a God of wrath, anger, and judgement. They are reaching out to Tomorrows God, who has nothing to do with religion, dogma, and creeds. A generation that is committed to flowering a New Consciousness on earth is here. It understands the time humanity is entering and is leaving behind all the darkness of religion to discover the God Jesus preached. This book is intended for people who can no longer make sense of God, Jesus, and The Bible as imposed by the Church in a legalistic and fundamentalist manner. It is for those who prefer to practice their Spirituality; through Social Media. The harvest is ripe in our Digital Age. This book is about stuff that can never be preached inside Churches today.

This is a book for tired people; those who are tired of Church dogma, creeds, and beliefs that they can no longer embrace in a Digital Age. If you are one of them, enjoy the journey we are taking together. If you happen to be still enjoying first century dogma, beliefs, and creeds, then this book will be a real offence to you. Millions of people are today, totally dissatisfied with the way churches do religion. Many speak of being "spiritual" but not "religious," honest rather than hypocritical. People are dissatisfied with the core message, dogma, and practice of the Christian faith in today's world. The fields are NOT filled with faithless people in need of the gospel. The fields are filled with millions of people of deep spiritual integrity who simply can no longer suffer the shallow messages of the churches of their birth any longer. Millions of people feel there is more to Christianity than the rigid rules and theological dogmas of the past. Christianity is poised to disappear

into irrelevance unless something very radical transforms it from its current pitiful state.

This book is about Jesus. It is not about the Jesus you are familiar with. It is about the Jesus that Deepak Chopra, in his book, *The Third Jesus*, says He is in trouble:

Jesus is in trouble. When people worship him today — or even speak his name — the object of their devotion is unlikely to be who they think he is. A mythical Jesus has grown up over time. He has served to divide peoples and nations. He has led to destructive wars in the name of religious fantasies. The legacy of love found in the New Testament has been tainted with the worst sort of intolerance and prejudice that would have appalled Jesus in life. Most troubling of all, his teachings have been hijacked by people who hate in the name of love.

A German scholar named Hermann Samuel Reimarus, writing in the 18th century, basically invented the modern Jesus wars by postulating a gulf between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. The real Jesus of Nazareth, he argued, was a political revolutionary who died disappointed, and whose disciples invented a resurrection — and with it, a religion — to make sense of his failure. So, today, instead of a Jesus the peacemaker, we get Jesus the nationalist or Jesus the apocalyptic prophet or Jesus the sage or Jesus the philosopher or Jesus the mystic or Jesus the deadly warrior on a horse, and so on down the list. There are today as many expressions of Jesus as there are Facebook walls. It's now acceptable that no two people can share the same view about Jesus. Most Pastors are not even aware that most of their Church members are heretics in terms of the Nicene Creed's definition of Jesus. Many Christians cannot explain the humanity and divinity of Jesus divide as envisaged by the fourth century Nicene Creed.

Many of us have the feeling that Christianity at its core; has something good to offer the human race. At the same time, we have the sense that the version of Christianity we see on TV, or hear about in political and social debates, or see in most of fundamentalist churches, is not the kind of Christianity we can call our home anymore. This is the type of Christianity that makes us feel ashamed to call ourselves Christians. This is the Christianity that has

divided God's people into "chosen" and un-chosen". This is the type of Christianity that embraces the ugly image of God as written about in Bishop John Shelby Spong's book, *Jesus for The Non-Religious*:

Christianity has (through the "inerrant Bible"), given us a God who caused the death of his son, the damnation of disbelievers, the subordination of women, the bloody massacres of the Crusades, the terror of judgment, the wrath toward homosexuals and the justification of slavery. The Father God embodied in the creeds is a deity who chooses some of the world's children while rejecting others. He is the father of wrath, the father of male domination and female submission, the father of literal and spiritual slavery!

You maybe one of those feeling there's no place in Christianity for deep thought, doubt, or questions that challenge the status quo. *Jesus for A Digital Age* is meant to create a safe place for you. It is an invitation to think much deeper and expansively on the subjects of God, Jesus, and The Bible. This book will help you go beyond the clichés of faith and pursue the questions that deepen your understanding as you make your own personal journey through a lifelong spiritual path. There is a great awakening happening right now. This book is part and parcel of this awakening. It is not a mistake that you have this book in your hands right now. You are being called to be part of a revolutionary re-visioning of a new kind of Christianity emerging in our universe. It is my prayer that this book will be a resource for you as you join with those who are discovering a faith that is relevant and meaningful in our twenty first century Digital Age.

In the next chapter I will be addressing the question of our current Age as the age prophesied and named, "The Age to Come" by first century Jewish writers. How do we do spirituality in this Age? Is this the final Age? Will there be another age after this one? This book suggests that this Age is the age humanity has been groaning for all millennia. Many New Thought writers like Eckhart Tolle have written extensively about this present Age. In his bestselling books, *The New Earth* and *The Power of Now*, Tolle shows us that once we grasp the concept of NOW; then we are home; we are safe and rested. There will never be another time except NOW. There will never be another Age except the Age we understand as NOW. This is the Age Jesus called Eternity. This is the

Age the author of Revelation saw as the Age where God dwells with his people. This is the Age where all tears will be wiped away. This may not happen in my generation, but I see myself as one of the Apostles who are called to birth A New Reality on our New Earth. I live my life in the present moment. This is my salvation, my peace, my rest, and my eternal life. I now know that I can never be outside of a time called NOW. I have embraced my ETERNAL LIFE!

The book starts with the premise that most of the world's population will soon enjoy open online communications and access to information. So what do they make of the two main levers available to religion and repressive regimes: to filter online content or cut off access altogether? Robert Brumet summarizes:

We are being called to go beyond our self not because this self is bad, but because we are being called to grow up. Our present egoic level of development was never meant to be the final stage of our evolution. ... Transformation is the freedom to function beyond the confines of any fixed identity. ... In the transformational journey it's important not to be attached to any image of what we seek to become. What we are looking for is that which is looking. What we become is what we have always truly been--yet have never known.

MOVING BEYOND THE TRADITIONAL JESUS STORY

Who and What is JESUS for a 21st century person? Millions of believers are still trapped in the TRADITIONAL understanding; as formulated by The Nicene Creed of 325 AD. The Nicene Creed itself came out of the political conditions that created The Council of Nicaea, which gave us The Bible. A careful study of the Early Church Fathers Debates reveals the Constantine Politics behind The Nicene Creed. TRADITION says Jesus is 100% God. We today know that Jesus was 100% human who grew (Luke 2:52) and evolved into his Divine Higher Self. He went through the pain, anxiety, questioning, uncertainty, and the doubts we all go through. So, it was a fully human being EVOLVING into a Divine Human over time. Do you think this AWAKENING is of the Devil? What does your TRADITION inform you?

The CURRENT AWAKENING is just a re-incarnation of The Holy Spirit in a secular world. Just like The Book of Acts was The Holy Spirit manifesting in the secular of that TIME.

THE GAMALIEL MOMENT IS UPON YOU!

What makes you angry the most; is meant for your freedom. People who make you angry the most, were sent by the universe to be your best teachers. Meditate and think deeply on what they have to say. No one made Pharisees angry like Jesus! YET, Jesus was sent by the universe to set Pharisees free from the limitations & exclusivity of their religion. There's no one who makes Conservative Christians angry like Liberal Scholars; YET, Liberals Scholars have been sent by the universe to liberate Conservative Christians and free them, from the limitations and exclusivity of their traditional religion. A great exodus from Biblical Fundamentalism and Literalism is upon the Christian Church, as I write this. You are reading this, now, at this very moment, because; the Gamaliel moment is upon you!

We should keep away from these men for now. We should leave them alone. I can guarantee that if the plan they put into action is of human origin, it will fail. However, if it's from God, you won't be able to stop them. You may even discover that you're fighting against God.

Acts 5:38-39

WHY FACEBOOK?

Man is entering a new phase in his and her self-consciousness, planetary, pluralist and historical; and human society a new phase of global conflict or community. The ideas of our new life together must themselves be new,

- W. Cantwell Smith.

Traditional Christianity is collapsing, in our time, because the Christian message has now become incredible to postmodern people. The story we are leaving behind was built on a mythical world of magic and superstition. Traditional Christianity's story has lost its power. History has shown us that once stories begin to be questioned, they need to be replaced by new stories; once Gods get questioned, get replaced by new gods. Our current axial age story of God was birthed when Greek Philosophers questioned pre-axial gods (Zeus, Olympus, Uranus, etc.) 2600 years ago. The idea of a Christian God, was thus, a synthesis between Greco-Roman mythology and Jewish mythology. Jesus had to be understood as a "Son of God" by both Greeks and Jews. Yahweh, God, and Allah don't share the same attributes. Jews cannot accept Christianity's Trinitarian idea of God, because to them Yahweh is one. They say trinity is a Greek idea of gods. Moslems say there is not God but Allah, and Christians and Jews are not supposed to confuse Allah with their Gods. All those who don't worship Allah will remain infidels until they convert. All those who don't worship the Christian God will remain unbelievers until they convert. Yahweh remains the God of the Jews; no one can worship Yahweh except the Jews. Jews are not allowed to have any other God besides Yahweh (Ex. 20:3). Humankind is now entering a New Consciousness and needs A NEW STORY and A NEW GOD.

WE ARE CREATING A NEW STORY! – We are leaving behind our old story where we were taught to refer to other human beings as: Unbelievers, Infidels, Gentiles, Barbarians, Wicked, Pagans, etc. We no longer see human being as "other". It was our EGOIC Religions that took us through that path. We all have to go past our religions before we embrace AWAKENING. The coming awakening will be happening on Social Networks (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google, etc.). There's just too much history to be shared and everything is

now freely available on the Internet. We are embarking on a spirituality that is compatible with our current cosmology.

Christianity can never survive on an outdated cosmology. Instead of continuing to use primitive superstition and myth to explain life, we need to do proper research and understand why our ancestors told THEIR story the way they did. We are, today, living in an age of: atoms, electrons, neutrons, quarks, Astrophysics, quantum mechanics, black holes, calculus, M-theories, etc. We can't be believing in Greek and ancient mythologies of virgins that give birth, spirits, magic, voodoo, Satan, demons, devils and even gods. This phenomena belongs to a world that is no more. Science can today explain all the myths and magic that our ancestors understood as reality. All stories are created out of words. We need new words to create new stories. All signs are pointing to the imminent collapse of traditional Christianity. Something new will take the place of the Church, as we know it. Facebook and other Social media will fill the gap.

We are a generation experiencing both, the death and the birth of God. We are creating a NEW STORY. We are birthing A NEW REALITY. We are birthing an understanding of God that is not conflict with modern scientific understanding. Indeed, we look deep inside science to find God. *Jesus for A Digital Age* is the FINAL coming of The Kingdom of God in its SECULAR FORM.

Social Networks are the Church of the Digital Age. There's a lot of hunger for truth and for logos; and a lot of questions amongst postmodern people today. These questions are not permitted in Churches that claim to have all the answers. In Europe, the home of Evangelicalism, millions left the Church after the scientific revolutions of the Enlightenment era. These millions will never come back to Church. They are lost to Church forever. Less than 1% of a European population estimated at five hundred million people attend Church on any given Sunday. This just means that just below five million people, in a population of five hundred million people, go to Church on any given Sunday. Yet; it is estimated that more than one hundred million people are very active on Social Networks. This is where they do their Spirituality. This is where questions are allowed. This is where millions are free to be their authentic selves. This is where doubt, questions, and a lack of faith is allowed. This is

where one encounters people who will never judge you. This is where you are not expected to give up being human in order to be spiritual. The same trend is happening in “Christian America”. Millions of people are deserting Church and doing spirituality on platforms like Facebook, Oprah Winfrey’s Super Soul Sunday and other Social Network platforms. I gave this book the subtitle, “Doing Spirituality on Facebook”; because since I joined Facebook in 2010, I’ve experienced nothing but wonder and magic. This is the place where miracles have happened for me. I’ve experienced consciousness and bonding like I’ve never had in my whole life. I’ve become bolder, expressive, and more spiritual. This is what I desire for all of humanity. It is for this reason that I wrote this book and I am pasting most of the important notes and messages that have impacted my life over the past four years on Facebook. The next Church is happening on Social Networks. Questions that are not allowed in Churches will be asked and answered on Social Networks. Our world has changed and is changing much faster than the organized Church can cope.

Globalisation has meant that we are moving from a closed constricting society to an open and free society. The closed society had a strong sense of its own identity from where we drew our security. Authority came from the top our freedom was significantly restricted. In our new global world boundaries are less distinct. People enjoy greater personal freedom (and more responsibility). People like me can write these kinds of books without fear. I could never have done this in the past century. It is all about time. This has serious implications for the Christian religion. Pastors are increasingly finding it difficult to exert control on the flock. For this reason, many Pastors treat post-modernism and secularism as one of their chief enemies. People are free to question truth claims. They no longer feel guilt about not coming to church. They no longer yield to controlling powers. The Internet is wide open for questions and answers. The Internet has evolved from read only to read and write, ask questions without fear. There is no Pastor watching you as you ask those questions. It is a difficult world! The Church is still trapped in pre-modern mythology, while the Church members have moved deep into post-modernism. What is; - pre-modernism, modernism, and post-modernism? Lloyd Geering explains it this way:

The term modern is often used simply as a synonym for 'contemporary', but there is more to it than that. Coming into the English usage about 1500 from the late Latin word *modernus*, the word 'modern' was used to describe obviously new things (as Shakespeare did frequently). Later, the period from 1500 CE onwards became known as the Modern World, following the Mediaeval World or Middle Ages (500-1500), and the Ancient World (500 BCE-500 CE). This division of history into three stages can be properly applied, of course, only to Christian west, who also, for better or worse, produced modernity.'

The post-Christian world and post-modern world we are now entering owes its very existence to the Christian civilisation of the last two thousand years. The world we occupy today remains deeply influenced by Christianity, its beliefs, customs, and culture. Our calendar; our weekly days; our valentine's days; Christmas holidays Sunday worship as opposed to Sabbath (Saturday) worship etc. Christianity will therefore never disappear without trace. The cultural stream that flows from our Christian past will be very influential in shaping the emerging Digital Age. Its stream of cultural influence will continue as a symbol embodying various important values, such as compassion, love, and caring for one's neighbour. Dogma, doctrines, and an ego tribal mind set will be a relic of the past.

As Lloyd Geering rightly points out:

The symbols, concepts, images, stories and myths of Christian origin, which remain deeply embedded in the fabric of western culture, will continue to offer the raw material from which people form their understanding of life, develop their capacity for spirituality and experience great delight, as they rediscover in the Bible and elsewhere the cultural treasures of the Christian past

THE OPEN WIDE WORLD

Christianity as a religion of guilt, control, and fear has had its days. This story had a beginning, like all stories, this story is reaching its ending. This has everything to do with time. Jesus warns us to read the time (Mat. 16:2). *Can we read this time?* When this new revolution is over, only the Christianity of unconditional love will be left. The spirit of fear, guilt and control that my detractors use against me so often will be gone. I am hopeful that my Christian tradition that I adore so much may lead towards a new world of

meaning. As the Christian tradition gave birth to reformation, enlightenment, atheism, theism, civilization, globalization, and a warmer world, I am hopeful that it will lead the way again. The Protestant reformation has given the world; the printing press in 1437; telegraph in 1837; telephone in 1876; radio in 1920; TV in 1950; internet in 1994; cyber-communication in 2000. Not to mention cars, aeroplanes, ships, technology, etc.

The early pioneers of modernity, such as William of Ockham, John Wycliffe, Erasmus, Martin Luther, Francis Bacon, Galileo, and John Locke, were all Christians by conviction. Protestantism and atheism both rightly emerged in the west in protest against the image of God as a wrathful medieval King. I see signs that Western Christianity will definitely lead the world into the new consciousness for a new world. The world as we have known it has indeed come to an end. There is a new world emerging before our eyes. There is a new body of Christians being raised by God to disciple the emerging world. I hope you will find yourself counted amongst the new pioneers. The reason why the current church answers no longer satisfy is that they were constructed to suit a world which looked very different from that we find ourselves living in. This book is about the paradigm shift and change of worldview that is needed for Christianity to be a source of hope for the 21st century and beyond.

The cosmology under which the Christian story was told is no longer believable by the inhabitants of our New Digital Age. The three-tiered earth with the heaven above and hell beneath is no longer the truth that it used to be. Space travel and information technology has made a very vast world small and within reach. Science has become the prism through which we interpret life and even understand our Bible.

As we begin the twenty-first century we discover that the world as we have known it has come to an end. This indeed is the prophesied end of the world. A New globalised Digital Age is rising before our eyes; a new cosmology of scientific understanding has made the mythical biblical world obsolete. In my travels in European countries I have seen this decline in Christian observance. You are lucky to find an operating church in any city of Europe. Churches have been turned into tourist attractions. It is like an invitation to

'look at our delusions of grandeur.' Many churches that used to be filled to capacity during the fiery revivals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have closed altogether. Existing few churches are made up of people aged 50 and older; young people are nowhere to be seen in church. The great cathedrals of Europe, where our kind of Lutheran, Swiss, Anglican, Catholic, Reformed, Presbyterian, etc. were formed, have become historic monuments to a past age, chiefly of interest to tourists. Are we deluded to think this will never happen to us?

My findings since I interacted on Facebook, is that millions of postmodern people desire to be spiritually left alone, without complications from organized religion. They, however appear to hope for a spiritual reformation – or even revolution – in their faith traditions and denominations. We have seen Congregations that exhibit a vibrant spiritual life embodying a living faith in practical ways succeeding, even in the religion bear market. These sorts of communities are models of what might be possible to renew wearied organizations. But the macro-structures of the Evangelical faith – denominations – have yet to hear this message. They are still trying to fix institutional problems and flex political muscle instead of tending to the spiritual longings of regular postmodern people.

"Spiritual and religious" expresses a grassroots desire for new kinds of faith communities, where institutional structures do not inhibit or impede one's relationship with God or neighbour. Postmodern people are searching for churches -- and temples, synagogues, and mosques -- that are not caught up in political intrigue, rigid rules and prohibitions, institutional maintenance, unresponsive authorities, and inflexible dogma but instead offer pathways of life-giving spiritual experience, connection, meaning, vocation, and doing justice in the world. They are not rejecting faith – they are, however, rejecting beliefs, dogma, and self-serving religious institutions.

The end of conventional church isn't necessarily a bad thing. Christianity after religion, a faith renewed by the experience of God's spirit, is closer to what Jesus hoped for his followers than the scandalous division, politics, and enmity we have now. Will there still be Christianity after the end of institutional religion? Yes, there

will be. But it is going to be different than what many Church folk have known, a faith responsive to the longings of those who are expecting more spiritual depth and greater ethical integrity rather than more conventional church. Indeed, I believe that the end of church is only the beginning of a new Great Awakening. This Awakening will reach much more people than the 1% that is being reached by the Church worldwide. Our emerging Digital Age in a post-modern world is not Christian in any traditional sense, but neither should it be called anti-Christian, as some Christians prefer to call it. A post-Christian world suggests continuity with our Christian past. It is an on-going stream of Christianity's cultural influence. Christianity itself was birthed from another cultural stream called Judaism. Judaism was born from a cultural stream called Zoroastrianism, which was founded by a spirit person called Zoroaster, who was influenced by Ancient Near East (ANE) Civilizations that existed four thousand years before Judaism was founded. This is the cultural stream out of which Abraham (or his contemporaries) was called (Gen. 11, 12). There is no religious tradition evolving on it's own and in complete isolation. Religious faith will continue in tandem with our civilization precisely because we are still-evolving creatures. It will never die out, or at least not until we get over our fear of death, and of the dark, and of the unknown, and of each other. We, as Christians need not fear a post-Christian world. There are many traditions we inherited from ancient traditions, they point to the long-term influence of culture.

For example, we still use the ancient Babylonian concept of the number base of 60 for counting time, we still use Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, etc., to call our days without even wincing that these were used to worship the gods of the day. Sunday was used to worship the sun god and so forth. Postmodern people desire the freedom to question, doubt, and loose faith without being judged. In the remarkable book, *The Faith to Doubt*, Holmes Hartshorne wrote,

People today are not in need of assurance about the truth of doubtful beliefs. They need the courage to doubt. They need the faith by which to reject their idols. The churches cannot preach to this age if they stand outside of it, living in the illusory security of yesterday's beliefs. These lie about us broken, and we cannot by taking thought raise them from the dead.

THE EMERGING GOD CONSCIOUSNESS

We have to work with whomever, atheists included, to promote the virtues of love, goodwill and peacefulness. To value the importance of the human relationships which bind us together into social groups and which enable us to become fully human. This is our global time. We need to rid ourselves of inhibiting myths and belief systems of the past. We need to be willing to sacrifice our own earthly pleasures and expectations in the interests of the coming generations. We need to work hard, like Moses, for a future world that we ourselves shall never enter. We need to create heaven for the future generations, just like our ancestors worked so hard to create the heaven we are enjoying today. We need to take the way of the cross, lay down our lives, as our Christian tradition calls us to do. Let the 'God' symbol be the focus of all that we supremely value and be a symbol that makes human existence meaningful and worthwhile.

There is no place, where we do not encounter God. This God is in the universe and beyond the universe. This God is in the earth, a very tiny part of the universe. This God is in all living creatures. This God is rising in our human consciousness. God and Nature is one and the same thing. You cannot be with nature long enough and not have an encounter with God. This God consciousness is rising amongst Muslims, Buddhists and Christians. This God is rising in our self-consciousness. This God is rising in the collective consciousness of the global human community. This God is the future God. This God is in the future. Lloyd Geering calls the rising Consciousness; *"God is calling us from a world yet to be created. But, to create this world, this God has no hands but our hands, no voice but our voice, no mind but our mind, and no plan for the future except what we plan"*. Human beings are now required to play the role they once attributed to an external deity. Human beings must learn that this life is all there is to life. We can either save the world or destroy it with our hands.

The Christian hope is for a universe where all tears will be wiped away. This hope should be a great incentive for moral action in anticipation of the possibility of a new future. We are the creators of a new world. The Kingdom of God is unfolding before our eyes quietly, unheralded, and unnoticed. It is the very same way Jesus spoke about the arrival of the Kingdom of God: *'You won't be able to observe the coming of God's imperial rule. People are not going to be able to say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'Over there!' On the contrary, God's imperial rule is right there in your presence'* (Luke 17:21). The freedoms we have spoken about in this book came about because the God of theism slowly disappeared in our consciousness and Christianity learnt to exist without this God. These freedoms; for women, slaves, homosexuals, etc. were manifestations of the coming of the Kingdom Jesus spoke about. When the early church said, 'the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed the deaf hear (Luke 7:22), they were reflecting on the Kingdom. Lloyd Geering sums the 21st century coming of the Kingdom:

There is increasing personal freedom to think and to speak, the slaves are being freed, patriarchy is crumbling, homosexuals are free to 'come out', weapons of mass destruction are being widely condemned, racist attitudes are being overcome, equality of the sexes is being achieved, the disadvantaged are no longer being ignored, human worth and values are being increasingly honoured!

God is calling you from the future Canaan land. Will you come?

WE ARE LIVING IN THE AGE TO COME

*Great Spirits have always encountered violent opposition from
mediocre minds*

Albert Einstein

Millions of Christians across the world remain trapped in the American Brand of Evangelicalism. Many are not even aware that they are living their Christian lives sucked inside a religious racket. As Barbara Rossing has observed in her insightful book, *The Rapture Racket*:

The Rapture is a racket. Whether prescribing a violent script for Israel or a survivalist mentality in the United States, this theology distorts God's vision for the world. In place of healing, the Rapture proclaims escape. In the place of Jesus's blessing of peacemakers, the Rapture voyeuristically glorifies violence and war. In the place of Revelation's vision of the Lamb's vulnerable self-giving love, the Rapture celebrates the lion-like wrath of the Lamb. This theology is not biblical. We are not Rapture-d off the earth, nor is God – NO! God has come to live in the world through Jesus. God created the world, God loves the world, and God will never leave the world behind.

Let us first glimpse the Orthodox Jewish understanding of Ages. Christianity is a stream that flowed from Jewish thought. The next kind of Christianity will be heavily influenced by Jewish thought, as opposed to the current literalist Christian thought. In Jewish understanding, the Messianic age is when the Jews will regain their independence and all return to the land of Israel. The Messiah will be a very great king, he will achieve great fame, and his reputation among the gentile nations will be even greater than that of King Solomon. His great righteousness and the wonders that he will bring about will cause all peoples to make peace with him and all lands to serve him.

According to Jewish thought, nothing will change in the Messianic age, however, except that Jews will regain their independence. Rich and poor, strong and weak, will still exist. However it will be very easy for people to make a living, and with very little effort they will be able to accomplish very much.... it will be a time when the number of wise men will increase.... war shall not exist, and nation shall no longer lift up sword against another nation.

The Messianic age will be highlighted by a community of the righteous and dominated by goodness and wisdom. It will be ruled by the Messiah; a righteous and honest king, outstanding in wisdom, and close to God. Do not think that the ways of the world or the laws of nature will change; this is not true. The world will continue as it is. The prophet Isaiah predicted "The wolf shall live with the sheep; the leopard shall lie down with the kid." This, however, is merely allegory, meaning that the Jews will live safely, even with the formerly wicked nations. All nations will return to the true religion and will no longer steal or oppress. Note that, in Jewish thought, all prophecies regarding the Messiah are allegorical and not literal.

Only in the Messianic Age will we know the meaning of each allegory and what it comes to teach us. Our sages and prophets did not long for the Messianic Age in order that they might rule the world and dominate the Gentiles; the only thing they wanted was to be free for Jews to involve themselves with the Torah and its wisdom.

According to the Talmud, the Midrash, and the Kabbalistic work – the Zohar, the 'deadline' by which the Messiah must appear is 6000 years from creation. Orthodox and Hasidic Jews believe that the Hebrew calendar dates back to the time of creation; the year 2014-2015 (the Hebrew New Year begins during September or October) of the Gregorian calendar corresponds to the Hebrew year 5774. There is a Kabbalistic tradition that maintains that the seven days of creation in Genesis 1 correspond to seven millennia of the existence of natural creation. The tradition teaches that the seventh day of the week, Shabbat or the day of rest, corresponds to the seventh millennium (Hebrew years 6000 - 7000), the age of universal 'rest' - the Messianic Era. Of course, all this thinking is definitely pre-Darwinian.

HEBREW AGES

In Hebrew thought there are three "ages": (1) Original Paradise, (2) the cursed or fallen world, and (3) the Messianic Kingdom. With this understanding, we know that Jesus was born after the Jewish nation had gone through eight hundred years of rule, exile, and domination by foreign powers. The first was the Assyrian domination that began in 792 BC. The Babylonian Captivity followed in 586 BC; where the

Jewish Temple (the place where God lived) was destroyed. Then came the Persians, followed by the Greeks, and ultimately The Roman occupation at the time of the birth of Jesus. Under the Romans, the Second Temple was completely destroyed in the Roman War of 67-70 AD. This destruction had a serious impact on how Jews understood and interpreted the Ages. More occupations and exile followed until 1948, when the state of Israel was formed. It was only in 1967 that Israel controlled a portion of Jerusalem, for the first time in more than almost three thousand years, since 792 BC.

The word “apocalypse” was birthed during the time when Jews were going through very hard times. An “apocalypse” was thus a Hebrew way of expressing hope for the victory of God and the triumph of righteousness. John the Baptist was an apocalyptic preacher, so was Jesus and the Apostle Paul who came after Jesus. John, Jesus, and Paul were all wrong about the end of the world in their lifetime. Jesus didn’t however envisage a total destruction of the world. He envisaged a world continuing in another form through what He conceived as the soon coming Son of Man, as prophesied in the book of Daniel.

Jesus saw himself as someone living at the end of an Age. The end of the Age and the end of the world are not the same in Jewish thought. No Jew would think ending the world because the world is God’s creation and according to Genesis 1, the world is ‘all good’ and without end. Jesus believed his world would soon be destroyed and be replaced by another Age. The question is not whether Jesus was right or wrong about the end of the Age. The real question that has been addressed by Progressive Scholars is this: Was Jesus’s message of “The Kingdom of God” an inclusive realm marked by justice and divine love or not. Did Jesus preach a violent overthrow of the Roman Empire? Didn’t Jesus say; “those who live by the sword will die by the sword?”.

Before I address the delusions of a literal “Second Coming” as advocated by religious fundamentalists today, I will firstly sketch the 19th century history the popularized this way of thinking. John Nelson Darby is known as the Father of ‘Dispensationalist beliefs’. John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) was an Anglo-Irish Bible teacher, one of the influential figures among the original Plymouth Brethren

and the founder of the Exclusive Brethren. He is considered to be the father of modern Dispensationalist beliefs and Futurism in the English vernacular. He produced a translation of the Bible based on the Hebrew and Greek texts called *THE HOLY SCRIPTURES: A New Translation from the Original Languages by J. N. Darby*.

John Nelson Darby was a nineteenth century Evangelist who cobbled together a cosmic calendar of events leading to the end of time. He used a mixture of verses in both the Old and New Testaments to construct a concoction of deadly heresies that have occupied the imagination of fundamentalists for the past two hundred years and more. Darby was the first to suggest that, before the end comes, Jesus would return to spirit away all "true believers" into heaven in an event He dubbed the "Rapture". Never mind that the word "rapture" never occurs in any Bible. The word "rapture" only started appearing in the recent Scofield Reference Bible of 1909. Modern fundamentalists, TBN, John Hagee, Jack Van Impe, Moody Bible Institute, and the latest multi-million sales of books like Hal Lindsey's *Late Great Planet Earth* and Tim LaHaye / Jerry Jenkins's *Left Behind* series.

Jesus came for a primitive world of the first century. Jesus is now manifesting through us, for a Digital Age of the twenty first century. The Second Coming of Christ need not be a gothic nightmare, as predicted by religious fundamentalists. The Second Coming of Christ is a promise of hope for the whole human population, not only for a few who believe like us. It was given to us in order for us to have hope. It should inspire hope for all those who have joined with God to rid the world of evil.

"An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah"

Matthew 16:14

The sign of Jonah should be a reminder to our modern day Fundamentalists of God's unpredictable grace. Jonah experienced firsthand how God short-circuits any legalistic understanding of rules or events that force the Divine to behave in a prescribed manner or show favoritism to one particular tribe over another.

The Gospels depict Jesus coming on a donkey and modern day Christian fundamentalism says He is coming on a horse to cause

untold mayhem in the universe. The current apocalyptic image of Jesus returning in power on a majestic horse with a sword in his hand, to slaughter the evil masses, absolutely contradicts the Jesus who taught us to love our enemies. It contradicts the Jesus who rode to Jerusalem on a donkey, and who would later tell his disciples that violence is not of God. How could one who practiced nonviolence and compassion denounce his core values and embrace brute force, violence and vengeance? It is simply inconceivable that the God revealed to us in Jesus Christ would resort to retribution. It is more than inconceivable; it is unbelievable. We are called to participate in the coming of the Kingdom of God in the here and now. We are the Second Coming of Christ; called to manifest a message of hope to a world in fear.

THE UNIVERSAL HUMAN:

Evolutionary Spirituality informs us that we human beings have been evolving for millions of years. We don't need to be restored to a state of perfection we never had before. We are BECOMING perfect from a long state of imperfection. Jesus did NOT come to restore us to a perfection we never possessed. Jesus came to empower our imperfect humanity. We as a cosmic humanity, share in the sufferings of Christ. We all have our portion of suffering. Life is suffering!

When I talk Universalism, I mean that the human experience is universal. We ALL share the same basic universal drives: a need for love, for freedom and respect, and the desire to feel as if our lives have meaning. Our pain, doubts, evolution & learning is a universal experience. The rain, sun, wind, summer, winter, heat & cold affects us equally. We worry, we question, we wonder, we lose sleep; ALL OF US! The up's & down's of human existence are universal. The trauma & joys of human beings are the same, it doesn't matter what religion, status, education they have. This is my understanding of universalism.

We ALL need to be SAVED. We need to be saved from SYSTEMS that have oppressed us all these years. To gain this salvation, we need KNOWLEDGE; a lot of knowledge. This is where our SALVATION lies. It is in increasing our KNOWLEDGE that we are saved; or else we all perish. The need for knowledge is a universal need as well!

BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS ON THE AGES

*The farther backward you can look;
The farther forward you are likely to see*
Winston Churchill

Wikipedia defines Hermeneutics as; “The theory of text interpretation, especially the interpretation of biblical texts, wisdom literature, and philosophical texts. The terms "hermeneutics" and "exegesis" are sometimes used interchangeably”. We therefore cannot do Hermeneutics today and disregard: Ancient Near East (ANE) Texts; Jewish History; Early Christian History; The History of Christian Theology; The History of Christian Thought; Ancient v/s Modern Cosmology; Anthropology; Ontology; Archeology; Secular History, Linguistics, etc.

The first rule of Hermeneutics is in understanding the original audience. This is called *The Science of Bible Interpretation*. Before we apply the Scriptures to the twenty-first century audience, let us understand the original audience this was written to first. Most Fundamentalist interpreters of Scripture do a very poor job in hermeneutics, let alone scientific knowledge. Pastor John Hagee likes to preach his delusional four blood moon sermons, but fail to tell his listeners that solar eclipses are not always red. NASA Astronomers that Hagee likes to use, don't predict the colors of lunar eclipses, only the approximate times are predicted. Hagee also fails to tell his listeners that previous lunar eclipses occurred after Israel's major events dates.

An easy Google search reveals that some of the lunar eclipses that occurred in 1492, 1949 and 1968; these were after the effect of Israel's momentous occasions. They occurred after the events Hagee tries so hard to link to Israel. Astronomers say the next solar eclipse (which may not be red) will be visible to about fifty three thousand people; very far from America and Israel. Renowned Astronomer, Dr. Paul Faulkner, has this to say on the coming solar eclipses:

The first eclipse (March 20, 2015) is total. Having personally experienced one total solar eclipse, I can testify that a total solar eclipse is stunning and awe-inspiring. Therefore a total solar eclipse could be interpreted as a great sign to those who witness it. But how

many people will witness this particular eclipse? The eclipse path is in the North Atlantic and Arctic Oceans. The only land fall that the eclipse path will make are the Faeroe Islands and Svalbard. The population of the former is 50,000 and the latter less than 3,000. The eclipse is of short duration, and the weather can be overcast much of the time at that latitude. There is a good chance that few people, if any, will actually see this eclipse.

The second solar eclipse (September 13, 2015) is partial and falls on Rosh Hashanah. Though many people have experienced a partial solar eclipse, most of them had no idea that anything was going on. This is because unless a partial eclipse is very close to being total, the sun is not appreciably dimmed. Not actually witnessing these events but instead just knowing that somewhere some sort of solar eclipses are happening seems to fall far short of being specific and spectacular signs of end times.

Hermeneutics deals with the audience the Scriptures were written for. The Bible was written to first century people. These Scriptures were written for them in their first century Age in order to be read and understood by us. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand this. For this purpose I will put Biblical Scholarship glasses aside and use *The Bible* the way literalists use it.

"Be on your guard! I have told you everything before it happens.
"Now, after the misery of THOSE days, THE SUN WILL TURN DARK,
the moon will not give light",

Mark 13:23-24

Jesus is said to be describing an event in the future here. Which future - distant or immediate? Were the hearers going to observe this? I'm using the book of Mark because it was the first Gospel to be written. Matthew 24 was written later but copied from Mark and added on. *The End of The Age* that is described in both Mark 13 and Matthew 24; happened in 70 AD with the destruction of the *Second Temple*. The temple had the *meaning* to Jewish people; just like the word church (as in building) has for Christians today. Jesus spoke of *this generation*; he was looking at the buildings of the temple, the stones, and the people he was speaking to. He did not say, "*that generation*". He even went on to say:

"I can guarantee this truth: *some of you standing here* will not die until they see the son of man coming in his kingdom."

Matthew 16:28

In my visions during the night, i saw among the *clouds in heaven* someone like the son of man. He came to the Ancient One, who has lived for endless years, and was presented to him.

Daniel 7:13

All of Jesus's and New Testament utterances on "*The Son of Man*" were influenced by this context. Would you rather have Hebrew-speaking Jews people or Greek-speaking Gentiles explain the MEANING of "*appearing on a cloud*"? – Any Jewish Rabbi and Scholar will tell you that any cloud language need not be taken literally. It is IDOLATRY to Judaism, to even imagine an invisible, unknown, ineffable G-d *literally riding on a cloud*. Once you literalize, you are engaging in idolatry. Yahweh "coming on a cloud" always meant God's judgment; in our case, it means the coming judgment against the likes of Fundamentalist idolatry! – I therefore think Fundamentalists would rather "ride a cloud with" Jesus, instead of engaging Scriptures. Fundamentalism has never, and will never survive a genuine study of Scriptures.

"This is the divine revelation about Egypt. The lord is *riding on a fast-moving cloud* and is coming to egypt. Egypt's idols will tremble in his presence. Egypt's courage will fail"

Isaiah 19:1

"he lays the beams of his upper chambers in the waters, *he makes the clouds his chariot*, who walks on the wings of the wind"

Psalms 104:3

Compare the two verses with Daniel!

"The vision about the 2,300 evenings and mornings that was explained to you is true. Seal the vision, because it is about things that will happen in the *distant future*."

Daniel 8:26

"Look! He is coming *soon* in the clouds. Every eye will see him, even those who pierced him. Every tribe on earth will mourn because of him. This is true. Amen".

Revelation1:7

"then the angel said to me, "don't seal up the words of the prophecy in this book because the time is *near*".

Revelation22:10

Daniel clearly speaks of things in the *distant future*; while revelation says *soon and near*. Does this mean God sometimes can't be clear? Did revelation mean the year 2014/15 by "*soon*" and "*near*"?

JEWISH THOUGHT ON AGES

The "*day of the lord*" was known to come *between* the ages. We have this age and we have *the age to come*. Which *age* are we twenty-first century people living in? Are we living in "*this age*" in terms of first century biblical hermeneutics? Or – are we living in "*the age to come*" as imagined by first century people listening on those days? What AGE did the Bible writers live in? Was it "*this age*" (their age) or was it "*the age to come*" (our age)?

"...but *this* is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel"

Acts 2:16

Prophet Joel's prophecy is being fulfilled here! Peter is saying. Peter was not talking about a prophecy still to be fulfilled two thousand years later. Peter was not prophesying, He was just confirming what Joel prophesied, five hundred years earlier.

"anyone who speaks a word against the son of man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the holy spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in *this age* or in *the age to come*".

Matthew12:32

Is the AGE to come Heaven, or is it *OUR AGE* today?

"...far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in *THIS AGE* but also in *THE AGE TO COME*".

Ephesians1:21

In *OUR AGE*; (which was *AGE TO COME* to first century hearers of Apostle Paul), we deal with powers and principalities!

"However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of *THIS AGE*, nor of the rulers of *THIS AGE*, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained *before the ages* for our

glory, which none of the rulers of *THIS AGE* knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory”.

1 Corinthians 2:6-8

What is it that Fundamentalists of *THIS AGE* are ignorant of?

Which *AGE* is *THIS AGE* according to Apostle Paul? Was He talking about *OUR AGE* (the age to come) or was He talking about *THIS AGE* (*their age*)?

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in *THESE LAST DAYS* spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds”

Hebrews 1:2

Which days were “*THESE LAST DAYS?*” – Was the writer talking about “*OUR DAYS*” – IN “*OUR AGE*” – OR – Was He talking about “*THEIR DAYS*” in “*their AGE*”? Who was being addressed here? -Us in 2014 or them in the first century?

He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at *THE END OF THE AGES*, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

Hebrews 9:26

It’s interesting that their *AGE* was also referred to as *THE END OF THE AGES!* --- This amplifies the thought that the next age; *THE AGE TO COME* would be *THE ETERNAL AGE*. There won’t be another *AGE* after our current *AGE* – *This DIGITAL AGE!*

“He indeed was fore ordained *BEFORE THE FOUNDATION* of the world, but was manifest in *THESE LAST TIMES* for you

1 Peter 1:20

The writer of Peter was convinced that their *AGE* was the last times of *A JEWISH AGE*, since the Foundation of the World. What would your response be if I tell you that *OUR AGE* – *RIGHT HERE* – *RIGHT NOW* –marks *THE LAST TIMES* of The Christian Age; Just like Peter wrote about *THE LAST TIMES of A Jewish Age?*

Audience relevance!!!

“So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now *IN THIS AGE* - houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions; - and in *THE AGE TO COME*, eternal life”.

Mark 10:29,30

THE AGE TO COME IS THE ETERNAL AGE – *THE AGE OF THE NOW* – THE PRESENT MOMENT! – THERE IS *NO OTHER NEW AGE* EXCEPT THIS NEW AGE! There is no other TIME except NOW! - *TIME WILL ALWAYS BE NOW - GOD WILL ALWAYS BE NOW!*

Christianity came to birth proclaiming *THE END OF AN OLD AGE* and the beginning of *A NEW AGE*. Two thousand years later, we are witnessing the rapid decline and death of traditional Christianity (*which was born out of a belief in A NEW AGE*), and we are observing the arrival of *A NEW AGE*; that is *secular and post-Christian*. Someone said that Christianity has been its own grave digger! - YET, this is also a paradox of Christianity; - *IT IS ONLY OUT OF DEATH THAT NEW LIFE CAN COME!*

EARLY CHRISTIAN AFFLICTIONS AND THEIR AGE

Experience supplies painful proof that traditions once called into being, are first useful, then, they become necessary; at last they are too often made idols, and all must bow down to them or be punished.

J.C Ryle

The question is; did Jesus come in the lifetime of his disciples? NO! – As far as Fundamentalist Christianity is concerned. Another rule of Hermeneutics is; the implicit has to be interpreted by the explicit. What did Jewish people understand by “coming in a cloud?”. Was this language used before in The Bible? What did it mean then? In Isaiah 19:21 Yahweh is described as “riding on a cloud”. Did they understand Yahweh riding literally on a cloud? Is this the way Jews thought about God? Did they think that God is a person or a being that could be seen riding a cloud? Is this the way Jewish people thought? Would Jewish people interpret the “riding on a cloud or coming on a cloud” language the way twenty first century Fundamentalists interpret Scripture?

What does Jesus mean by, “Some of you standing here?”- It means that some of them will die, but some will not die. Did this happen? Yes, it did! By the year 70 AD, some of them had died, but some did see the Second Jewish Temple, a place where God was thought to live; destroyed in the Roman War. The first time a thing like this happened was in 586 BC, when The Babylonians invaded Israel and destroyed Solomon’s Temple. This destruction of the Temple led to the writing of the Bible with the resultant punitive theology about God. Jews thought they would be in Babylon exile forever. They then began writing their Torah for the coming generations. The destruction of The Second Temple in 70 AD led to the writings of the Gospels, Faith Communities began to write their respective Gospels because they realized they were dying without having written anything down about the life of Jesus. They then wrote for the coming generations.

“So when they persecute you in one city, flee to another. I can guarantee this truth: *Before you have gone through every city in Israel, the Son of Man will come*”.

Matthew10:23

How come this verse is now interpreted to mean, “every city in the Universe?” – *Where’s the Hermeneutics of Audience Relevance?*

“Brothers and sisters, we have this request to make of you about our Lord Jesus Christ's coming and our gathering to meet him. Don't get upset right away or alarmed when *someone claims* that we said through some spirit, conversation, or letter that *THE DAY OF THE LORD HAS ALREADY COME*”.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-2

What does this verse written *TO* first century Thessalonians tell us about Jewish thought? Did they think about the coming of the Lord like our Fundamentalists of today? Did they think the “day of the Lord” will come with fire, brimstone and worldwide destruction? NO! They would not have thought the day has already come, if they thought that way. *They would not have easily believed those who claimed the day of the Lord had already come. If it was a violent coming, they would have just seen the violence and fire.*

THE WORLD OF APOSTLE PAUL!

The Apostle Paul was led to believe that he would live to see Jesus' second coming. As you read this, remember this; - Paul was hated by his own Jewish people; for misunderstanding & misinterpreting the Jewish Torah! – Who was right? - Paul or first century Jews? You be the Judge!

"[God will give] relief to you who are afflicted *and to us as well* when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels *in flaming fire,*"

2 Thess. 1:7

He thought that Jesus would return soon at his time? He counted himself in! *He was wrong!*

"... but, *WE who are alive and remain* until the coming of the Lord will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. *Then WE who are alive and remain* will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air"?

1 Thess. 4:15-17

The Apostle Paul anticipated that *He* would be alive when the resurrection of the just took place? He talks about *this* and not *that*!

"Behold, I tell you a mystery; *we will not all sleep*, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, *and WE will be changed*. For *THIS* perishable must put on the imperishable, and *THIS* mortal must put on immortality."

1 Cor. 15:51ff

The earlier Paul never anticipated his own death! --- Later, He conceded that death was at the door!

Toward the end of his life, in his pastoral letters, Paul didn't speak this way so perhaps this conviction was proven to be in need of correction (*Assuming Timothy was written by Paul; Scholars say Timothy was written long after Paul's death*)

"You've heard my message, and it's been confirmed by many witnesses. Entrust this message to faithful individuals who will be competent to teach others".

2 Tim. 2:2

"*My life is coming to an end*, and it is now time for me to be poured out as a sacrifice to God. I have fought the good fight. I have completed the race. I have kept the faith".

2 Timothy 4:6,7

Paul and other Apostles, and indeed all the New Testament authors, believed they were living in the "*last days*" — that "*EVIL AGE*"

"...Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present *EVIL AGE*..."

Gal. 1:4

Apostle Paul was very adamant the END was right at the door. There was no time for marriage, even! – Paul thought his world was disappearing soon, and those who believed like him would soon be whisked into a different world. 2000 years later – we still have Fundamentalists who think with Paul's first century mind! How many times do you watch Gospel TV and hear this from Christian Fundamentalists?

"Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? *Do not seek a wife*. [28] But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not

sinned. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you. [29] But this I say, brethren, *the time is short*, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, [30] those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, [31] and those who use this world as not misusing it. For *the form of this world is passing away*.

1 Corinthians 7:27-31

There is place where retribution against Jews and Romans is clear like in these verses! – *Jews should be punished just because they refused to be bound by a Greek interpreted Old Testament (Septuagint)*, which was used to interpret the life of Jesus! Jews preferred their Hebrew Old Testament instead of the Greek version of their own Scriptures. How many Fundamentalists pronounce this kind of punishment on us, on a daily basis? – Just because we see Scripture differently from them!

“This letter is from Paul, Silas, and Timothy. We are writing to the church in Thessalonica, to you who belong to God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.We proudly tell God's other churches about your endurance and faithfulness in all the persecutions and hardships you are suffering.....[5] But God will use this persecution to show his justice. For he will make you worthy of his Kingdom, for which you are suffering. [6]..and in his justice *he will punish those who persecute you*. [7] And God will provide rest for you who are being persecuted and also for us when the Lord Jesus appears from heaven. He will come with his mighty angels. [8] in flaming fire, bringing judgment on those who don't know God and on those who refuse to obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus. [9] *They will be punished with everlasting destruction, forever separated from the Lord and from his glorious power* [10] when he comes to receive glory and praise from his holy people. And you will be among those praising him on that day, for you believed what we testified about him”.

2 Thessalonians 1:1-10

As a twenty first century person; living in a highly globalized Digital Age, I find the first century, Roman occupied, Second Temple, Post-Jewish culture, perspective of Paul appalling (pardon the pun). Apostle Paul does exactly the opposite, compared to how Jesus taught us to relate with those we see as enemies. Jesus said Hell was reserved for The Sons of The Kingdom (- but the sons of the

kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. -Matthew 8:12),

Paul says NO; it's for those who oppose Paul's Theology. Paul has some nasty things to say against those who opposed his theology! Many Scholars, while they appreciate the value Paul brought to the message of the Gospel, also accuse him of being a Theologian who turned the message of Jesus into a complicated set of doctrines, dogma and imposed his own orthodoxy on everybody. Paul was a mixed bag, all his short Christian life. Sometimes He excelled on the message of the grace of God; other times He became a rabid Fundamentalist who formed a religion out of the figure of Jesus Christ. At other times He called for curses on those who saw things differently from him; He even resorted to calling those who differed with his Theology, ugly names like; *dogs* (Phil 3:2; Gal 5:12; Gal1:9). Some were called "*liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons*" (Titus 1:13). Those opposed to 'sound doctrine' are called "*immoral persons, sodomites, kidnappers, liars, and perjurers*" (1 Timothy 1:10). Over the past few years since my own awakening, I've heard some Christians say the most painful things to me and about me. I have observed them use all kinds of Un-Christlike and diminishing language against me. When I question their rationale for using this language, they quote Apostle Paul! Only die hard Fundamentalists treat him like an icon and spread his propaganda as "the word of God". Paul held on to ancient beliefs, that it was possible for women to have sex with angels (1 Cor. 11:10). He was definitely, a man of his times, a man of his AGE, - Not out twenty first century Digital Age.

EARLY CENTURY UNDERSTANDING

Early Christians believed they would soon be rescued from the wrath about to come upon their persecutors (the Romans and Jews). Remember that Galatians was written long before the Roman War of 67-70 AD. Both Romans and Jews were now enemies to the Jesus Movement. This was long before they were called Christians. They all believed and were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write in scripture, that Christ's predictions would be fulfilled during their lifetime.

“Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the *ENDS OF THE AGES* have come”.

1 Cor. 10:11

First-century Christians expected the returning Christ to give them relief from persecution and deliverance from the wrath about to come upon the whole world (The Roman civil War and disastrous Jewish revolt of 67-70 AD).

“Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. - It is *in the last days* that you have stored up your treasure!”

James 5:1,3

Various Biblical and Extra biblical sources show us that the Church was birthed in very troublesome times of resistance, revolt, and war! It was testing times indeed. John, the very writer of Revelation, wrote while exiled in Patmos. (*Some say He might mixed spinach with weed, judging by some of his utterances!*)

“Because you have kept the word of my perseverance, I also will keep you from *THE HOUR OF TESTING*, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. *I AM COMING QUICKLY*; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown”.

Rev. 3:10-11

(Through John; Jesus said, “*I AM COMING QUICKLY*” – But He was just making a Jewish Joke 2000 years ago! – It seems like Fundamentalists don’t get Jewish jokes, because to them, *QUICKLY* just means 2000 years later and more! – In Daniel God specifically spoke of “*A DISTANT FUTURE*”; In Revelation He specifically said “*QUICKLY*”)

There was a fervent desire to be rescued from these evil times!
– The seemed to have resorted to the God of vengeance!

“...Wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who *RESCUES US* from the wrath to come”.

1 Thess. 1:10

“And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in *MUCH AFFLICTION!*”

1 Thess. 1:6

The day of the Lord (seen also as a day of vengeance against enemies) was NOT 2000 years into the future. It was at the door!

“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see *THE DAY APPROACHING*”.

Hebrews 10:24-25

They saw *their age* as the last hour – 2000 years ago; not in 2014!

“Little children, it is the *last hour*; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many anti-christs have come, by which we know that it is THE LAST HOUR.”

1 John 2:18

For first century believers, their AGE was ending. It was one minute to midnight! –One can't read this and think they were talking about an even 2000 years from their day!

“And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for *now* our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light”.

Romans 13:11-12

THE MEANING OF ANTI-CHRIST

The word “Christ” (/kraɪst/) (ancient Greek: Χριστός, Christós, meaning 'anointed') is a translation of the Hebrew מָשִׁיחַ (Māšîaḥ) and the Syriac ܡܫܝܚܐ (M'shiha), “The Messiah”, and is used as a title for Jesus in the New Testament. Hebrew people use the word “Moshiac”. According to orthodox Judaism, the rise of Christianity was perceived as the negation of the rise of their expected Moshic. So, early Christianity was regarded as “Anti-Moshic” (Anti-Christ). There are very deep biblical scholarship roots behind this. The fact that Christianity embraced the Greek translated Hebrew Old Testament (Septuagint) also contributed. Until today, many Orthodox Jews still regard Christianity as an Anti-Moshic (Anti-Christ) movement.

For early Christians, however, Anti-Christ's were Jewish people who rejected the Christian interpretation of Jewish scriptures. Gentiles could not be called Anti-Christ, since they had not yet adopted the idea of a Messiah. It was in the late decades of the first century that many forms of Christianity started emerging and they started calling each other Anti-Christ. Some people, in the first century, denied that Jesus had come in the flesh. They desired Jesus to be God, BUT – God cannot be said to be human!

That was the debate.

“By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you *have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.*

1 John 4:2-3

Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even NOW many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour.

1 John 2:18

Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; *he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also*”.

1 John 2:22-23

All the above scriptures point to the tensions that were prevailing during the Christians versus Jews disputes of the first century. 1 John was written around 100 AD, after Christians had been chased out of the Jewish Synagogues in 88 AD. The idea here was to stigmatize the Jewish community with the metaphor of Anti-Christ. Unfortunately, this stigma stuck and was embraced by even the Renaissance mystics, the Reformers, the Popes, and ended giving us the Holocaust, where six million Jews were incinerated. This was all out of a belief that Jews were Anti-Christ; though Jews themselves saw the Christian movement being Anti-Messiah (Anti-Christ).

Is life repeating itself in our time? Have we been here before? Can we say, like our first century ancestors in 97 AD, the spirit of the Anti-Christ is here? There is currently a spirit that denies the

emerging Cosmic Christ. Who is Anti-Christ today? Is it not Christians who deny that, in our day, just like in the first century, Christ is manifesting through human flesh? Is the spirit of the Anti-Christ not the spirit that denies the universal awakening sweeping the universe today? Are those who care less about the least of these; (the poor, the naked, the destitute) – not anti the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 25: 42,43?

“For I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.”

Do Fundamentalists accept that CHRIST is manifesting IN HUMAN FLESH? NO! Are Fundamentalists replaying 1st century Orthodox Jews who flatly refused that God can manifest through HUMAN FLESH? Are they (like their counterparts) going to WAIT endlessly for the arrival of their Messiah? Are they also preferring; their TRADITIONS over what God is doing in our TIME? YES! Orthodox Judaism could not accept Jesus because He did not FIT IN with the Interpretations of THE TORAH according to THE TRADITION handed down by The Fathers. Evangelicals can't accept the rising CHRIST CONSCIOUSNESS because it does not FIT IN with the INTERPRETATION of Scriptures as handed down by the Evangelical Fathers.

If Jesus were born in in Africa, HIS-STORY would be embellished with African Myths, Culture, and BELIEFS. It does make sense that the person of Jesus got to be covered with Greco-Roman Myths of births, Greek Hellenization Beliefs of dying gods, Prophet Zoroaster's Beliefs, and a highly Platonic Jesus. Imagine Jesus being just a suffering human, as opposed to a suffering God; Jesus would then be in class with all suffering humans: - Buddha, Ghandi, Mandela, Luther-King, etc. 500 years before Jesus was born, The Buddha said, LIFE IS SUFFERING! – So, take suffering as a package of life and not as any sort of victimization!

Millions still prefer THEIR TRADITION – over - The Word of God; which is EVIDENT through so many rising Masters. TRADITION IS MORE POWERFUL THAN EVIDENCE!

"So for the sake of YOUR TRADITION (the rules handed down by your forefathers), you have set aside the Word of God [depriving it of force and authority and making it of no effect]".

Matthew 15:6 (Amplified)

This comes from my Facebook notes:

- **JESUS** embraced the lepers whose rotting flesh was condemned as untouchable by the Scripture quoting religious tradition.
- **JESUS** allowed the touch of the woman with chronic menstrual discharge; the religious tradition quoted Scripture that said that She was corrupting and unclean.
- **JESUS** set aside the Sabbath tradition when it conflicted with human needs. Scripture quoting Pharisees could not accept this.
- **JESUS** called Levi Matthew, a Jew who worked for the Romans as a Tax Collector - and was therefore unclean according to Jewish ritual laws. Jesus went into a Tax Collector's house and actually ate with them! – This was anathema in the Jewish tradition.
- **JESUS** refused to condemn the woman taken in adultery, as the Fundamentalists quoted Scriptures which dictated that She be stoned to death.
- **JESUS** embraced Samaritans, Gentiles, Syrophenicians, etc. – who were the prejudiced minority according to Jewish Scriptures. The LGBT Community represents these people today.
- **JESUS** opened the way for those regarded as outsiders to be reconciled. He sub-verted doctrines, beliefs, prejudices, and religious Scriptural doctrines that kept them outside.
- **JESUS** was labeled as one who; "has a demon" and a "drunkard," but never "hateful", "self-righteous," or "ignorant". Jesus dealt with hateful Pharisees on a daily basis.
- **JESUS** chose the marginalized minority over the dominant Scripture quoting religious people of his day. Jesus would be

at home with the marginalized LGBT community today; Again; the dominant Scripture quoting religious people demand they be marginalized & dehumanized.

- **JESUS** spoke of God judging on the basis of feeding the hungry; welcoming strangers; clothing the naked; caring for the sick; visiting prisoners and living compassionately.

THE SCOURGE OF FUNDAMENTALISM

Philosophers, Scholars, and Theologians have for years been engaged with the highly elusive subjects of God, Jesus and The Bible. Fundamentalism, instead of engaging Scripture, has always resorted to the idolatry of extremist beliefs. As Philosopher Pete Rollins, in his brilliant book, *How (NOT) to speak of God*, has observed:

The primary problem with idolatry is not that it falsely claims to have a connection with God but rather that it falsely claims to understand the God it is connected to... If we fail to recognize that the term 'God' always falls short of that towards which the word is supposed to point, we will end up bowing down before our own conceptual creations forged from the raw materials of our self-image, rather than bowing before the one who stands over and above creation.

In her recently released book, *The Case for God*, Karen Armstrong has given us a detailed overview on the scourge of fundamentalism that has mushroomed all over the religious and secular world over the past few decades:

Christian fundamentalists take a hard line on what they regard as moral and social decency. They campaign against the teaching of evolution in public schools, are fiercely patriotic but averse to democracy, see feminism as one of the great evils of the day and conduct a crusade against abortion...Christian fundamentalists are convinced that their doctrinal 'beliefs' are accurate, final expression of sacred truth and that every word of the Bible is literally true...Fundamentalists are swift to condemn people whom they regard as the enemies of God: most Christian fundamentalists see Jews and Muslims as destined for hellfire and some regard Buddhism, Hinduism and Daoism as inspired by the devil.

She proceeds to deal with fundamentalism in other faiths:

Jewish and Muslim fundamentalists take similar stance, each seeing their own tradition as the only true faith. Muslim fundamentalists have toppled governments and some extremists have been guilty of terrorist atrocities. Jewish fundamentalists have found illegal settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip with the avowed intention of driving out the Arab inhabitants, convinced that they are paving the way for the Messiah; others throw stones at Israelis who drive their cars on Sabbath.

Karen Armstrong, on the reading of scripture:

Fundamentalists often distort the tradition they are trying to defend. They can, for example, be highly selective in their reading of scripture. Christian fundamentalists quote extensively from the Book of Revelation and are inspired by its violent End-time vision, but rarely refer to the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus tells his followers to love their enemies, to turn the other cheek and not to judge others.

Jewish fundamentalists rely heavily on the Deuteronomist sections of the Bible and seem to pass over rabbis' injunction that exegesis should lead to charity.

Muslim fundamentalists ignore the pluralism of the Qur'an and extremists quote its more aggressive verses to justify violence, pointedly disregarding its far more numerous calls for peace, tolerance and forgiveness.

WE ARE LIVING IN THE AGE OF ETERNITY

Ernest Holmes, our Master Spiritual Teacher saw this world long before the current awakening. This is how He sums up our world:

Beloved, now are we the sons of God. Your kingdom of God is at hand. You have already inherited everything that belongs to this kingdom. The riches, power, glory and might of this kingdom are yours today. You do not rob others by entering into the fullness of your kingdom of joy, your kingdom of abundance. You recognize that all people belong to the same kingdom. You are merely claiming for yourself what you would that the law of good should do unto all.

There is no law of human heredity imposed upon you. Evil has no history. Limitation has no past. That which is opposed to good has no future. The eternal now is forever filled with the presence of

perfect life. You always have been, and forever will remain, a complete and perfect expression of the Eternal Mind, which is God, the living Spirit Almighty.

SAY:

- Today I enter into the limitless variations of self-expression; which the Divine Spirit projects into my experience.
- Knowing that all experience is a play of Life upon Itself, the blossoming of love into self-expression, the coming forth of good into the joy of its own being, I enter into the game of living with joyful anticipation, with enthusiasm.
- I play the game of life well and I enjoy it.
- Today I enter into my Divine inheritance, shaking my thought clear from the belief that external conditions are imposed upon me.
- I declare the freedom of my Divine Son ship; I possess the Kingdom of God in all its fullness.
- I look long, sincerely and simply, upon every object, every person.
- I wait at the doorway of my expectation until my acceptance grants me the privilege of beholding His face forever more.
- I shall not wait long, for today I expect to see His shining presence, I expect to don the 'seamless rob' of Divine union.
- Today is my day.
- I let it live itself through me.

THE RESURRECTION A NEW POSTMODERN REALITY

If Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain.

1 Corinthians 15:14

If the resurrection of Jesus cannot be believed except by assenting to the fantastic descriptions included in the Gospels, then Christianity is doomed. For that view of resurrection is not believable, and if that is all there is, then Christianity, which depends upon the truth and authenticity of Jesus' resurrection, also is not believable.

Bishop John Shelby Spong

Does your belief in the Resurrection require a body? Did Paul's belief require a body? Did the first Gospel writer, Mark, require a body? Paul says, "I saw the Lord", but He is not talking about a body! Paul is talking about a spiritual seeing (mystics call it the second seeing); in mystical thought it's THE REAL SEEING! There is no subject that is sacrosanct to Christianity like the topic of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. We need to deconstruct this narrative for a generation that no longer believes there is a literal God beyond the canopy we call the sky; where Jesus is supposedly sitting at the right hand. Science has killed the God thought to live above the sky. Science has also made this God unemployed and homeless. The majority of believers have been trained to embrace a very simplistic literalist view of the resurrection. For those whose faith is dependent on a literal, physical resuscitation of Jesus's body, any suggestion to the contrary will be very offensive and tantamount to a heresy. In a very strange paradox of our times, Christianity that is based on a literal resurrection of the body of Jesus is now dying and being replaced by a Christianity that based on the resurrection of "The Christ Experience". There's a new Christ Consciousness resurrecting in our time. Christ is resurrecting within the hearts of millions of people, across different religions, around our globe

It is still surprising that in the twenty-first century, theologically literate people still assume that the term 'resurrection' has very clear and definable meaning. Lloyd Geering explains it in more detail:

The term, resurrection, originated quite some time before the Christian era, as a consequence of the eschatological myth of the last judgment. It was of necessity, therefore, a mythical or symbolic term from the beginning and open to a wide variety of interpretations. This diversity is amply demonstrated within the pre-Christian Jewish writings. That is why the New Testament itself is also far from uniform in the way the term is understood. The Gospel of Mark even reports how the disciples questioned 'what the rising from the dead meant'. Paul, Mark, Luke and John all seem to have understood the resurrection of Jesus in different ways.

The first person to write about the resurrection was the Apostle Paul. The Gospels were all written twenty to fifty years after the writings of Paul on the resurrection. Paul says He never knew Jesus after the flesh. Paul never met the literal historical Jesus, yet Paul had an experience that made him to count himself amongst those who had visions of Jesus. He says, "Jesus appeared to me". (1 Cor. 15:18). He further questions, "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen our Lord" (1 Cor. 9:1). Paul concludes his lengthy exposition on the resurrection with an emphatic declaration that, "flesh and blood will not inherit the kingdom of God". (1 Cor. 15:50). Let us remember that Paul wrote this long before Matthew and Luke's communities dealt with sophisticated Greek critics of Christianity such as Lucian, Trypho, and Celcus. These critics linked Jesus with Apollonius who was said to have been fathered by Zeus (the Greek mythical God).

Biblical Fundamentalists always insist that the Bible can be trusted. I still maintain that the Bible can't be trusted on anything whatsoever. If we can't trust the Bible on the genesis of all things, how can we trust it anywhere? Anyone who calls "the Bible the inerrant, infallible, holy word of God", just manifests ignorance of the Bible. We need not mince any words on truths about the Bible. It has fallen from its pedestal on too many issues that arise out of the new form of consciousness. The Bible now speaks to a world that is no more. We will occasionally visit the Bible to gain wisdom, just like we do with any ancient literature. Many of the Bible's traditional symbols were created to suit a cosmology that has been made outdated by the evolution of the global world. The cosmological revolution (pioneered by Copernicus and Galileo) has displaced the supposedly flat earth on which we lived and replaced

it with a vast space-time universe. The biological revolution (most effectively promoted by Charles Darwin) has changed our understanding of the origins of planetary life from one of sudden creation not so long ago, to one of slow evolution of species over billions of years.

I get frustrated by the widely accepted mentality that; if the Bible is opposed, the idea must be wrong. This goes against my discoveries about the same Bible being wrong about so many things. The Bible was wrong about the rise of democracy as the Magna Carta event of 1215 revealed. The Bible was quoted to prove that Galileo Galileo's scientific findings were wrong; that Charles Darwin was wrong; that Sigmund Freud was wrong; that Nicolas Copernicus was wrong; that Isaac Newton was wrong; that allowing women to be educated, to vote, to enter the professions and to be ordained was wrong. We now accept that the Bible was wrong. We accept that the Bible was wrong about slavery and woman subordination. The Bible is wrong about homosexual people. Yet, religious people keep quoting the Bible to justify their continued state of un-enlightenment.

CONTRADICTIONS

The bible and religion are the most difficult subjects to debate, because there are no facts to deal with, it is mostly opinions, beliefs, assumptions, personal interpretations etc. Yet there are people who see themselves as custodians of the absolute truth as far as God, the Bible and Religion is concerned. There is no book that I have read like the Bible. It is very important that you understand this, even before you judge what I have to say below. I have read this book since I gained self-conscious and started reading at age six. I have read this book for a total of forty-five years now. I have read the Bible backwards and forwards in my early Pastoral years. I studied the Bible intensely, constantly and deeply, for the twenty years that I Pastored a Church. I have read it on different levels at different stages of my life. I now read it as a scholar and critic. I have shaken my conception of the Bible as "an authority" and I now read it from the point of entering into the experiences of its writers. It then, and *only* then, works as "the word of God" for me. Over the past two hundred years, Biblical Scholarship has unearthed tons and tons of

information on the Bible. Today, one can ask any question on the Bible and come with millions of Internet pages of enlightenment.

There are flat-out mutually exclusive contradictions amongst the books of the New Testament. Sometimes these discrepancies can be reconciled if we work hard enough at them with our imagination. Some contradictions cannot, in my opinion, be reconciled, however hard we try. Jesus is born in Nazareth and Bethlehem (geography). Jesus dies on different days in Mark and John. Jesus is crucified *before* the Passover in John and *after* the Passover in Mark. The literal resurrection happened in Galilee and Jerusalem. Was Jesus in doubt and despair on the way to the cross (*Mark*) or calm and in control (*Luke*)? Did Jesus' death provide atonement for sin (*Mark and Paul*) or not (*Luke*)? Did Jesus perform signs to prove who he was (*John*) or did he refuse to do so (*Mathew*)? Must Jesus' followers keep the law if they are to enter the Kingdom (*Mathew*) or absolutely not (*Paul*)? Did Jesus have his own house (*Mark*) or not (*Luke*)? Everyone had an own personal agenda!

Who actually went to the tomb? Was it Mary alone (*John 20:1*)? Mary and another Mary (*Mathew 28:1*)? Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome (*Mark 16:1*)? Or; women who had accompanied Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem; - possibly Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and "other women" (*Luke 24:1; 23:55*)?

Had the stone already been rolled away from the tomb (*Mark 16:4*)? Or was it rolled away by an angel while the women were there (*Mathew 28:2*)? Whom or what did they see there? An angel; (*Mathew 28:5*)? A young man; (*Mark 16:5*)? Two men; (*Luke 24:4*)? Or, nothing and no one; (*John*)? What were they told (more contradictions)? If they tell someone, who do they tell (more contradictions)? What did the (contradictory) people who were there told do (more contradictions)?

Did they not believe the women because this seemed to be an "idle tale" (*Luke 24:11*)? Or do they go to the tomb to see for themselves (*John 20:3*)? What happens next (more contradictions)? They all commented to further their own personal agendas.

Did the Apostle Paul lie? After his Damascus conversion, did Paul go directly to Jerusalem in order to confer with those who were before him? In Galatians 1:16-20 Paul himself says He did not confer with anyone and He (Paul) did not go up to Jerusalem to “those who were apostles before me”. He then says, “In what I am writing to you, before God, I am not lying!” Was Paul lying when He said, “before God, I am not lying”? Was He lying before God? Only God knows! Really? Only God? According to Acts 9:9-30, Paul headed directly to Jerusalem where he met with the Apostles of Jesus. Did Paul spend time with other Christians immediately (Acts) or not (Paul)? Did Paul go straight to Jerusalem (Acts) or not (Paul)? Did Paul meet with the group of apostles (Acts)? Or just with Peter and James (Paul). Did the churches in Judea know Paul (contradictions)? Did Paul go to Athens alone (contradictions)? How many trips did Paul make to Jerusalem (contradictions)?

Other questions: when Jesus entered Jerusalem, how many animals did He ride (one says Mark) (two says Matthew). Why does Matthew quote the wrong prophet (Mathew 27:9-10; Zechariah 11:3)? What did Jesus tell the high priest when questioned at his trial (Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69)? When was the curtain in the Temple ripped (Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45-46)? What did the Centurion say when Jesus died (Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47)? Was Jesus naked when He left his tomb (Matt 27:35; Jn. 19:23)? Did the Churches in Judea know Paul (Gal. 1:21-22; Acts 8:1-3 / Acts 9:1-2)?

I have given a full list of other contradictions in appendix B. I’ve done this because I wanted my readers to understand that there is no book that I have studied like the Bible. The Bible was written by at least 150 different people, in dozens of different places at different times, many centuries apart, and for different reasons. The biblical authors were human too! They had likes, dislikes, opinions, views, prejudices, biases, perspectives, and so on, like the rest of us; and all these things affected how they saw the world and wrote the scriptures. This simple fact is widely ignored by Christians. The focus of my critique is the New Testament. It is an irony that Jewish people do not take the Old Testament literally but Christians take the New Testament literally, though the New Testament is mostly interpreted from the non-literal Old Testament. As Prof. Lloyd Geering observes:

Jews have never developed a dualistic world to the degree that Christians have done. Jews have never accepted the Christian doctrine of the fall, even though Christians base this doctrine on Jewish scriptures. Jews remained more ready than Christians to accept human mortality, and their scriptures even declare that God is the creator of evil along with good.

I did not know that what Jews, Catholics and Protestants call “the Bible” are different books. My intensive study of the Bible has unearthed a self-contradictory mishmash of arcane rules and prescriptions belonging to a world that is no more. For example; - the gospels were not written by the disciples. They were written two to three generations after the death of Jesus in 33 CE. They were written 35 to 70 years after the death of Jesus. Mark was written in 70-72 CE, Mathew in 82–85 CE, Luke in 88-93 CE, and John in 95-100 CE. Mathew copied 90 percent of Mark into his gospel and Luke copied 50 percent of Mark. Gospels are human constructs interpreting the person and wisdom of Christ in human language.

I do not believe that God ever intended that the Bible be a trustworthy guide to physics, calculus, dynamics, oceanography, ancestral DNA, anesthesiology, biology, geology, astronomy, quantum physics, etc. We no longer see the world with spectacles borrowed from the Bible, we actually read the Bible with spectacles borrowed from science.

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST TODAY

How do we talk of the resurrection in this Digital Age? I’m working from the assumption that there was no literal body that ascended to heaven on Easter Morning (according to Luke’s Luke) or on the Ascension Day (according to Luke’s Acts) or on another day in another place (according to Matthew and John). There was however *something* that happened in the days following the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. “*Something*” transformed the disciples of Jesus from being uncertain followers to heralds and committed disciples who were even willing to die for their cause. This is how my Spiritual and Intellectual Mentor, John Shelby Spong puts it:

There is no question in my mind that had there not been some transforming experience that happened to the disciples after the death of Jesus that convinced them that he had conquered the boundary of human death, there would be no Christianity. But what people don't understand is that the idea that this experience meant the resuscitation of a deceased body that could walk physically out of a tomb on the third day after crucifixion is a very late developing tradition. You will not find it in Paul; you will not find it in Mark. Most people are surprised to know that in the first Gospel, Mark, written in the early seventies, the risen Christ never appears to anybody!

It's only in the later Gospels that he only appears, but offers his flesh to be inspected and eats and walks and talks and interprets scripture. It is a very late development in the tradition. There is a powerful Easter experience that starts the whole Christian faith, transforms the disciples, changes them from cowards who had forsaken him and fled and brought them back into being heroic followers of this Jesus, that changed the way they understood God.

So, whatever that Easter experience was, they could never again think of God without seeing Jesus as part of that definition. They could never again see Jesus without feeling that God was part of the divine definition. Something incredibly powerful happened, but it had nothing to do with the resuscitation of the body.

After reading this, I remembered a song we used to sing in my early born again days. It goes like:

“He touched me, OH! He touched me – OH!
What joy, that floods my soul! Something happened;
Jesus touched me – and – made – me whole”

Whatever the events were surrounding the first Easter; early followers of Jesus got propelled into a new way of living. They felt touched. They felt whole. They were compelled to evaluate their Jewish heritage in ways that accounted for their experiences of Jesus, both in his temporal life and as a spiritual presence in the present. No one knows what literally happened to the body of Jesus! We have five very contradictory accounts in the Bible. It is good to read these stories as simply stories with no need to compare them with one another. They were not written in order for them to be compared and critically analyzed. They were written for their specific communities, to celebrate the life and presence of Jesus in their lives.

Jesus's teachings were never about religion. They are not even about the next life. Jesus taught about everyday life and relationships. Jesus was about life in the NOW. Jesus taught us to care about what happens to others, to the poor, to the naked, to the unsheltered. Jesus taught us to care for those outside our tribe, those we don't even know, those we've been taught to not like at all.

Jesus was fully human. It was out of his full humanity that Divinity was expressed. Jesus lived in the mystical dimension where He recognized that He was part of who God is and what God is. Jesus loved deeply; Jesus loved selflessly; Jesus loved wastefully; Jesus was willing to give his life away. Jesus loved the unlovable; forgave the unforgivable; accepted the unacceptable – Jesus loved the sinner; Jesus forgave the religious persecutors, Jesus was found amongst those considered a scum of society. He continued loving even when He was attacked, persecuted, condemned, hated and called names by narrow religious minds. He responded with LOVE to all. He did not have anger, hate, resentment or bitterness, to give. He gave LOVE in the presence of persecution.

The Jesus story means that God takes us just as we are and then loves us into being all that we are capable of becoming. The gospels develop this Jesus portrait as one who was denied, betrayed, abandoned, persecuted and killed, but who then loved the denier, the betrayer, as well as those who abandoned, persecuted and killed him. His message was that there is nothing you or I can ever do or be that will place us beyond the boundaries of God's infinite love. That is how the Jews told the Jesus story. How far we Christians have wandered from our original message! Christianity is not about guilt; it is about grace. It is not about judgment and punishment; it is about love and forgiveness.

THE PRACTICE OF THE RESURRECTION

The resurrection narratives of Jesus are similar to narratives of Osiris, Attis, Mithra, and many other resurrected gods. These were celebrated in many ways over the centuries. These are similar to the term "Son of God". This title was given to Jesus in order to be acceptable to both Greek speaking people and Jewish people. All Greek avatars were "Sons of God" who were said to, have been "born of virgins" and "resurrected". We need some new metaphors to talk

about the resurrection in our postmodern universe. Whether we are Atheists, Christians, Jews, Hindus, Moslems, Buddhists, Taoists, Confucians, Shinto's etc. we find ourselves "entombed" by our attitudes, circumstances, childhood beliefs, and so many daily choices.

There are metaphorical "rocks" that need to be removed in order for us to live again. No one is immune from the pain and suffering that an integral part of the human condition. Both Buddha and Jesus embodied suffering as the existential human condition. No one escapes the trauma of life. Sometimes, along our path of life we face the fracturing of the soul. Our loved ones get taken from us through death or divorce. We question the anguish of life until our very souls are anguished by the questions themselves. Our fragile soul gets broken into many pieces. We despair and we die inwardly. We face betrayal, death, insecurity, poverty in different forms, questioning, guilt, fear, arrogance, confusion, addiction, indifference, darkness of soul, etc. There are times when every one of us experiences the dark night of the soul. We feel alone and helpless. We need a resurrection and a new life NOW. As De Wane Zimmerman says:

The message of the resurrection is not simply, "Don't be afraid to die." Surely it is that. And all of us when we lose someone we love, or on our day of dying will need the comfort of the resurrection. But I believe the message of Easter is not simply "Don't be afraid to die," but "Don't be afraid to live – to live for the things worth dying for"

The message of the resurrection in our postmodern world is to practice dying as the highest form of wisdom, as suggested by antiquity Philosopher Socrates. Life is precious. Let's share it with generosity. The message of the resurrection teaches us to live fully in this life, giving of ourselves and risking for love's sake. Help someone who is hurting. Open the eyes of someone who is blind. Free the captive. Heal a wound. Feed someone who is hungry. Give the gift of yourself. The gift of who we are is given to us in order to be given away.

The secret of practicing resurrection is in giving away who we are and what we have – completely and wholly – to something greater than ourselves. It is in escaping from the circumstances and choices that entomb us and entering into life new life here and now. As we embrace resurrection as a credible and meaningful principle

for living, we, like Jesus, have the potential to become more than anyone around us – or even ourselves – could have imagined. Here's some pearl of wisdom from Winnie Varghese:

Resurrection is the central teaching of the Christian church. When we try to live authentically, to do what Jesus called us to do, when we do this work of inclusion and of welcome, we get death threats. There is death all around us. If death is the end, then we are sort of defeated by the powers of this world. The Christian teaching is that there will always be hope for the fullness of God's justice in every time. We will fight for it because we have a story of resurrection. We are not defeated by death. Our God is not defeated by death. But it doesn't mean we won't die.

THE FUTURE OF CHRISTIANITY

The Christian world is disintegrating because the Christian story on which it is based is losing its power. The Christian orthodoxy began its demise with the loss of the status of an infallible church and infallible Pope during the Catholic years of dominance. This was followed by the demise of the 'divine and infallible Bible'. Christian orthodoxy as 'right beliefs' is coming to an end. All stories have their day, their alpha and omega, though some last much longer than others. Lloyd Geering, the New Zealand Jesus Seminar scholar, says:

As worlds are constructed out of stories, so stories are built out of words. The key terms in the Christian world – purgatory, hell, heaven, fall, last judgement, angels, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, holy trinity, and even God – remain words. They have been very important words, words that helped to create a meaningful world for those living within it.

Some of these words will remain because of their capacity to mediate meaning and personal happiness. I presume the third world will use these words longer than the first world will. We are already only using these words when necessary, like in funeral services. But in the meantime new ideas and new words have come into being, arising out of a new form of consciousness. Out of these new words a new story is beginning to be told and on this story a new world is emerging.

What is the time as far as the Christian story is concerned? The Christian story had a beginning, like everything, it has to have an ending. It had its Alpha – and like all stories will have its – Omega. The traditional Christian way has to die before resurrection and the flow

of new wine. Jesus taught us not to put new wine into old wine skins. Our traditional God concept has to die before a new God concept can evolve. Our historical kingdom tradition has taught us not to pour new wine into old skins. We need to completely destroy the old skins in order for the new skins to be created for the new wine.

As theologian Tom Driver says:

Christianity has been compelled to see itself as a religion *relative* to other religions and relative to the history of the world. Christianity does this reluctantly...The gap between Christianity and modern theories of relativity is widening so much that the church's teaching about Christ is in danger of losing both its intellectual and its moral credibility. To think of Christ as the centre, model and norm of humanity made a certain sense in the Ptolemaic universe, which had the Earth as its centre. It continued to make sense, however strained, in the Copernican universe, which had the sun as its centre. Today, Christocentrism cannot make sense in the Einsteinium universe, which has no centre and in which every structure is a dynamic rationality of moving parts...The ethical theological task of the churches today is to find a Christology that can be liberating in a world of relativity.

How is it possible that the Christian world which was experienced by so many of us for so long as real, convincing and absolutely true, can now be undergoing an almost complete dissolution? How can a tradition that has given so much meaning to us be collapsing? This is not the first time it happens. It happened around the year 1000; it happened again around the year 1500, where the protestant tradition was born. It is happening again in the 21st century (observe the 500 year time periods). We can only deal with this question by grasping the fact that God and Christianity is not necessarily the same thing. There is a difference between the two entities. Amongst the variety of books that have been released lately and are still being released every month, there was an article in 2009, from the late Michael Spencer of the Internet Monk about the coming Evangelical collapse. His main premise is that:

- Roughly a quarter to a third of the American population will be non-religious, and our culture will become more antagonistic towards Christianity.
- The Charismatic-Pentecostal movement will undergo a major face-lift and reformation.
- Christian media will decline, if not disappear entirely.
- The Emerging Church will mostly be swallowed up in Theologically-Liberal, mainline denominations.
- A remnant of Christians will seek to redeem culture around them by living in accordance with the gospel of Jesus in a way that transforms society.

OUR NEW SECULAR AGE

All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as self-evident.

Arthur Schopenhauer

Apocalypse does not point to a fiery Armageddon, but to the fact that our ignorance and our complacency are coming to an end. The exclusivism of there being only one way in which we can be saved, the idea that there is a single religious group that is in sole possession of the truth - that is the world as we know it that must pass away. What is the Kingdom? It lies in our realization of the ubiquity of the divine presence in our neighbors, in our enemies, in all of us.

Joseph Campbell

Harvey Gallagher Cox, Jr. is one of the preeminent Theologians in the United States and served as Hollis Research Professor of Divinity at the Harvard Divinity School, until his retirement in October 2009. In 1965, He released one of the immensely popular and best selling theological books, selling over a million copies, the book became a sensation among liberal theologians. The title of the book is, *The Secular City*. In that book, Professor Cox celebrated the advent of secular urban civilization and the retreat of traditional Christianity. Cox developed the thesis that the church is primarily a people of faith and action, rather than an institution. He argued that, "*God is just as present in the secular as the religious realms of life*". Far from being a protective religious community, the church should be in the forefront of change in society, celebrating the new ways religiosity is finding expression in the world. Phrases such as "intrinsic conservatism" prevents the denominational churches from leaving their palaces behind and stepping into God's permanent abode. Revolutions in history were viewed as threatening to the status quo by some, or seen as an embrace of the new; just like the social revolution of the 1960s.

Secularization, He suggested, as "an authentic consequence of biblical faith," would liberate men from the religious superstitions of the past and turn their attention, as the God of Genesis intended, to fashioning the world around them. He pointed out, there was nothing new in this acclaim for the secular epoch. The thesis of *The*

Secular City is that God is first the Lord of history and only then the Head of the Church. This means that God can be just as present in the secular as in the religious realms of life, and we unduly cramp the divine presence by confining it to some specially delineated spiritual or ecclesial sector. This idea has two implications. First, it suggests that people of faith need not flee from the allegedly "godless contemporary world". God came *into* this world, and that is where we belong as well. But second, it also means that not all that called is "spiritual" is good for the spirit. He further suggested that these ideas were not particularly new. Indeed, the presence of the holy within the profane is suggested by the doctrine of the incarnation - not a recent innovation. The doctrine of incarnation caused early Christians to deny that Jesus came in the flesh (1 John 4:2,3). Philosophers like Don Cupitt have also suggested that by God becoming man in Jesus of Nazareth, the universe entered a secular and profane Age. As for suspicion toward religion, both Jesus and the Hebrew prophets lashed out at much of the religion they saw around them. But some simple truths need restating time and again. Hebrew Prophets were never friends with Priests. And today is surely no exception.

Let's hear Harvey Cox explain The Secular Age:

The English word *secular* derives from the Latin word *saeculum*, meaning "this age." The history of this word's career in Western thought is itself a parable of the degree to which the biblical message has been misunderstood and misappropriated over the years. Basically *saeculum* is one of the two Latin words denoting "world" (the other is *mundus*). The very existence of two different Latin words for "world" foreshadowed serious theological problems since it betrayed a certain dualism very foreign to the Bible. The relationship between the two words is a complex one. *Saeculum* is a time-word, used frequently to translate the Greek word *aeon*, which also means age or epoch. *Mundus*, on the other hand, is a space-word, used most frequently to translate the Greek word *cosmos*, meaning the universe or the created order. The ambiguity in the Latin reveals a deeper theological problem. It traces back to the crucial difference between the Greek spatial view of reality and the Hebrew time view. For the Greeks, the world was a place, a location. Happenings of interest could occur *within* the world, but nothing significant ever happened *to* the world. There was no such thing as

world history. For the Hebrews, on the other hand, the world was *essentially* history, a series of events beginning with Creation and heading toward a Consummation.

The impact of Hebrew faith on the Hellenistic world, mediated through the early Christians, was to “temporalize” the dominant perception of reality. The world *became* history. *Cosmos* became *aeon*; *mundus* became *saeculum*. But the victory was not complete. The whole history of Christian theology from the apologists of the second century onward can be understood in part as a continuing attempt to resist and dilute the radical Hebrew impulse, to absorb historical into spatial categories. There have always been counter-pressures and counter-tendencies. But only in our own time, thanks largely to the massive rediscovery of the Hebrew contribution through renewed Old Testament studies, have theologians begun to notice the basic mistake they had been making. Only recently has the task of restoring the historical and temporal tenor to theology begun in earnest. The word *secular* was an early victim of the Greek unwillingness to accept the full brunt of Hebrew historicity. From the very beginning of its usage, secular denoted something vaguely inferior. It meant “this world” of change as opposed to the eternal “religious world.” This usage already signifies an ominous departure from biblical categories. It implies that the true religious world is timeless, change-less, superior to the “secular” world that was passing and transient. Thus the vocation of a “secular priest,” one who served in the “world,” though technically on the same level, was actually thought of as somehow less blessed than that of the “religious” priest who lived his life in the cloister, contemplating the changeless order of holy truth.

The medieval synthesis resolved the tension between Greek and Hebrew by making the spatial world the higher or religious one and the changing world of history the lower or “secular” one. The biblical assertion that under God all of life is drawn into history, that the cosmos is secularized, was temporarily lost sight of. In its first widespread usage, our word *secularization* had a very narrow and specialized meaning. It designated the process by which a “religious” priest was transferred to a parish responsibility. He was secularized. Gradually the meaning of the term was widened. When the separation of pope and emperor became a fact of life in Christendom, the division between the spiritual and the secular assumed institutional embodiment. Soon, the passing of certain responsibilities from ecclesiastical to political authorities was designated “secularization.” This usage

continued through the period of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution and obtains even today in countries with a Catholic cultural heritage. Consequently, for example, when a school or hospital passes from ecclesiastical to public administration, the procedure is called secularization. More recently, secularization has been used to describe a process on the cultural level; that is parallel to the political one. It denotes the disappearance of religious determination of the symbols of cultural integration. Cultural secularization is an inevitable concomitant of a political and social secularization.

The modern secular age, it seems, is now ending, and the theology that sought to explain it has been rendered obsolete. The worldwide return of religion as a potent social force suggests that we are entering a “post-modern” era of “religious revival and the return of the sacral.” Liberal theology, which devoted itself to explaining the role of religion in the secular era, must give way to a theology better suited to the new age. According to Cox, the beginnings of this post-modern theology have already appeared, “borne by vigorous anti-modernist religious movements.” To ascertain what these movements can contribute to the coming theology, Cox singles out two for extended analysis: American fundamentalism and Latin American liberation theology. Having declared that the kingdom was of this world, they could now choose among the various movements that were claiming to usher it in; but on what grounds? As Cox himself said in his book: *“We are trying to live in a period of revolution without a theology of revolution. The development of such a theology should be the first item on the theological agenda today.”*

While fundamentalists are *“highly critical of the modern world and its theology and also strenuously engaged with it,”* the movement is limited theologically by its attachment to secular means and goals. Despite its reactionary origins, fundamentalism has cast its lot with the modern world, particularly technology; there is, Cox warns, an *“unavoidable contradiction”* between the fundamentalists’ anti-modern message and their reliance on mass media. Moreover, the movement is too ideological, too closely identified with the support of capitalism and American foreign policy. By allying themselves with these narrow political goals, the fundamentalists have excluded themselves from a post-modern

theology, which must address the hitherto dispossessed people of the world: namely, women, minorities, and the poor.

Postmodern people in a Digital Age are trying to make Jesus' life purpose their own; they represent "the lowest castes, the outsiders, the poor and ritually impure". They actively support and defend LGBTQ people. This diminishing of human beings by Fundamentalists leads Post-modern theology to embrace religious pluralism; in a world torn between oppressors and oppressed, the doctrinal differences among religions become insignificant. And as surely as Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey, Post-modern theology will bring a Secular Kingdom to earth.

Indeed, many Post-modern people are asking; what has happened to our society? What is happening to our religious practices? Why don't people go to church? Is our faith relevant to today's society? Will religion die out? How many times have you been involved in discussions around these issues among believers and non-believers? For most of us we find it difficult to articulate any sound and measured response. The future is a total unknown. Many thinkers are questioning if indeed we are in the same place that Jesus found himself in when He predicted the destruction of the Second Temple; a very sacred place for Jewish people. Was Jesus announcing the end of the Jewish Age and the beginning of the New Age – the world to come?

SECULARIZATION

What is secularization? Cox reiterates the definition of Dutch theologian C. V. van Peursen:

"(Secularization is) the deliverance of man, first from religious and then from metaphysical control over his reason and his language. It is the loosing of the world from religious and quasi-religious understandings of itself, the dispelling of all closed worldviews, the breaking of all supernatural myths and sacred symbols. It represents the "defatalisation of history," the discovery by man that he has been left with the world on his hands, that he can no longer blame fortune or furies for what he does with it. Secularization occurs when man turns his attention away from worlds beyond and towards this time."

Cox goes on to say: *“Secularization implies a historical process, almost certainly irreversible, in which society and culture are delivered from tutelage to religious control and closed metaphysical world views.”* This implies deliverance through the tribal, town, large cities and changes experienced in the technological era and now in the Digital (cybernation) Age. Modern science is now starting to answer all the big questions: how did we get here, where did we come from, and where are we going. These questions are not being answered with ancient tools like the Bible, but with new tools and information that has recently been made available to us. Humankind has truly entered the secular age, and that is the coming of God’s Kingdom in secular form.

SECULAR MAN:

So what is this secular man? Cox sees him as very pragmatic and profane. *“By pragmatism we mean secular man’s concern with the question ‘Will it work?’ Secular man does not occupy himself much with mysteries.... Pro-fane means literally ‘outside the temple’... By calling him ‘profane’, we do not suggest that secular man is sacrilegious, but that he is unreligious.”* He is a man who is living in a large society (city) with multitudes of choices and distractions. He has no choice but to be in command of his own destiny. He can no longer rely on a mystical God to deal with his life. God has given him this world and he is required to manage it. The Secular man departmentalizes his life in order to survive at work, at play and at home. Cox says *“The anonymity of city living has helped preserve the privacy essential to human life; the secular man wants to maintain a clear distinction between private and public.”* The secular person now resorts to the field of physics, and recently quantum mechanics; these have revealed things about the world we live in that could not have been known even half a century ago – things like the nature of matter and the structure of cells and proteins. For this reason, the secular person finds God (if He believes in God at all) deep within the process of scientific evolution.

RELIGIOUS BODIES

Cox anticipates the complete reorganization of religious bodies, leading to their removal from all things capable of being dealt with by the state. Further, the freeing up of these bodies from property ownership, company investment and the like, thus will align them with their true mission *“to perform the supportive role of the good things that are happening, and the critical voice against things that are damaging to human life in society, a prophetic voice.”* He says that: *“Jesus did not try to assume worldly power, secular power at all, but confronted the corrupt powers, both religious and secular of his time, from a position, a freed position, of non-violence and un-involvement in the running of the society.”*

Cox is concerned that we live in an age of accelerating change, with a static theology. So one of the fundamental questions to be asked is: *“What are the sources of meaning and value by which man lives his life? Are they created and imposed by God, or does man invent them himself?”* If man is now the leader (the responsible one) then: *“our task is that of developing a theology of politics, and in particular a theology of revolutionary social change.”* Generally in our time, the preacher, priest or the religious, who speaks to man about God remains for the most part unheard of - Cox's holds that: *“The sociological problem of speaking about God is that the role of the people who try to do so places them immediately in a perceptual context where what they say can be safely ignored.”* Cox sees the way forward as embracing the tenets similar to recent experiences of 'Liberation Theology' which is essentially a religious movement having political expression, or a political result. *“Liberation theology is that ‘accompanying’ the poor and the captives in their pilgrimage; is not only an ethical responsibility, but also provides the most promising context for theological reflection.”* - Cox, adds.

PASTORAL DUTIES

Instead of Priests and Pastors, Cox suggests that the future will have ordinary loving people with a pastoral heart. Pastoral people do not limit their care to those of their own faith beliefs. Nor do they seek to proselytize. They will allow each and every person to fully walk their path and have their own life experiences. For them to be truly pastoral, Cox provides a good insight to the secular man within *The Secular City* and outlined the 'why' he/she is what he/she has become. Understanding this is an important step in our caring ministry where we must accept fully a person's journey and in doing so rejoice in the goodness of each person. There is no doubt also that pastoral care would fit well into Cox's social response to the Gospel. Pastoral people and others who have strong ties to religious bodies and creeds may no doubt feel uncomfortable with Cox's almost complete removal of the metaphysical and also to his challenge to the wider role religious organizations undertake today. But he does lead us to open our minds on the future of peoples' belief in God and seeks to show one way in which this belief can be outwardly demonstrated.

Don Cupitt proposes a reinterpretation of Christian history, arguing that the meaning of the West is not Catholic Christian but radical Christian. The original Jesus was a secular figure, a utopian teacher of ethical wisdom. After his martyrdom his followers personified his teaching in him and promoted him to Heaven, while postponing the earthly realization of his new world until his return at the end of history. Thus transformed into a religion of deferred salvation, 'Christianity' flourished for some fifteen centuries, but it always knew that its final fulfillment would be on this earth, and from the Enlightenment the decline of the Church was also the beginning of Christianity's extraordinarily successful afterlife as modern Western culture. The Pentecostal dream lives on in our multi-ethnic liberal democracies, Jesus' ethic lives on in our modern humanitarianism and in the welfare state; and the Christian spirituality of stringent self-examination lives on in our critical thinking and our spirit of perpetual striving for betterment. Indeed, Cupitt argues that the core of Western culture is simply the old Christian spirituality extraverted. Today, Christian supernatural

doctrine is dead, but the secular 'West' is Christianity itself now emerging in its final, 'Kingdom' form.

We came from the same “place”; scientists call it the singularity before all time and space; before our Universe began. The same “place” (If I may call it that), where everything, living and non-living, past, present, future, - originated from. This need for oneness, for return to singularity; has no one path. We can no longer look unto religion to help us return to singularity. Religion postulates an external God who must be blamed for the Holocaust, the murder of babies, disappearing planes, the rich becoming richer at the back of the poor, governments behaving badly, corporations abusing workers, colonization and slavery, etc. Religion says it was inevitable; it could not have been avoided. There is nothing to learn. We are not responsible. Today, we are learning that, we, as humans of the New Earth, are growing, learning, and taking responsibility for our New Earth and our New Being in it.

FALLING IN LOVE WITH A PROFOUNDLY HUMAN JESUS

A believer is a bird in a cage, a free thinker is an eagle parting the clouds with tireless wing.

Robert G Ingersoll

This chapter is most definitely not for believers! Let us not mince our words! Jesus was not born of a virgin, was not born under a star, did not walk on water, did not raise Lazarus or anyone from the dead, and never literally raised the dead. Today, all liberal Jesus Scholars agree on this: Jesus was born in a perfectly natural way in Nazareth. His mother was not the icon of virgin purity. His earthly father, Joseph, was a literary creation. His family thought he [Jesus] was out of his mind. He probably did not have twelve male disciples. He had disciples who were both male and female. He did not command nature to obey him. He did not in any literal sense give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf or wholeness to the paralyzed and infirm. There was no stylized Last Supper in which bread was identified with his broken body and wine with his poured-out shed blood designed to symbolize his final prediction of death. There was no betrayal and no romance connected with his death, no mocking crowd, no crown of thorns, no words from the cross, no thieves, no cry of thirst and no darkness at noon. There was no tomb, no Joseph of Arimathea, no earthquake, no angel who rolled back the stone. There was no resuscitated body that emerged from that tomb on the third day, no touching of the wounds of Jesus, no opening by him of the secrets of scripture. Finally, there was no ascension into a heaven that exists above the sky. – All the above claims belong to a dying Christianity of dogma, creeds and beliefs.

The true gospel of Jesus Christ is just as radical today as it was 2,000 years ago. The notions of loving one another, blessing your enemies, taking care of the poor, forgiving those who have wronged you, turning the other cheek, and humbling yourself and dying to your own selfishness, are still radical notions and still the path to true spiritual growth. And none of this can be done without the grace of God in Christ Jesus. This is a far cry from the Christianity of fear, power, and punishment currently being propagated.

The Christian Church has been hung up on literalism and Greco-Roman mythology for too long. Even the very title “Son of God”; was influenced by Greco-Roman Imperialism rather than Jewish thought. When Christianity spread to the Gentiles, around 40-90 AD, our ancestors had to find a language that would make Jesus The Son of God who was born of a virgin, died and rose again; just like other avatars of the Greco-Roman world. Without this kind of language; Jesus would never have been accepted by Greco-Roman people, as being sent from God. The very idea of “a virgin birth” is part of Greek mythology. There is a reason why you are reading this book, at this very time in your life, dear reader. The universe is now ready for a Jesus who is devoid of dogma and mythology. The time has arrived for a human Jesus to be unveiled; a Jesus who is exactly like; you and me. A Jesus who goes through the same doubts, misgivings, growth paths, loss of faith, lack of will, questions God’s will like all of us. A Jesus who also gets weary, gets forsaken by those He depended on, gets betrayed and experiences the fracturing of his soul, just like all of us. Christianity is being resurrected from its two thousand year Gentile captivity to begin its new foundation on a purely and profoundly human Jesus.

It is my desire to communicate my findings of biblical criticism to a wider audience. The time and the universe is ready for a discovery of the real Jesus, as opposed to the Jesus of our Mayan mythological past. I am writing this book for those who have rejected religion as it is taught and practiced in most churches today and for those who may still have faith but who have given up on organized religion. Most Evangelical Christians are still not aware that there is a difference between the historically authentic elements in the New Testament portrayal of Jesus, and the later layers of liturgical and theological interpretation, that has embellished the Gospel stories. It is my sincere wish and prayer that this book will free people from the prison of religion, and will usher in a Renaissance and a Reformation that will usher in a new burst of energy and power that has not been seen for hundreds of years. The Gospels consistently depict a Jesus who is radical and confronting and unsettling – a Jesus who challenges the status quo, who hangs out with the wrong people and antagonizes the establishment, who

resists every attempt to domesticate his message, refusing to allow his actions to be calmly assimilated into any existing religious framework. And for just this reason, the Jesus of the Gospels is finally *executed*. In all the years of my Evangelical upbringing, I never knew there was a distinction between the Jesus of history (what Jesus actually said and did) and the Christ of faith (what the Christian movement came to believe about Jesus). Most of the Christian language about Jesus came with the Second Temple Judaism (after the destruction of the 2nd Temple in 70 AD). In his book, *How Jesus became God*, Bart Ehrman explains:

If Jesus had not been declared God by his followers, his followers would've remained a sect within Judaism — a small Jewish sect, and if that was the case it would not have attracted a large number of gentiles. If they hadn't attracted a large number of gentiles, there wouldn't have been this steady rate of conversion over the first three centuries to Christianity; it would've been a small Jewish sect.

If Christianity had not become a sizable minority in the empire, the Roman emperor Constantine almost certainly would not have converted, but then there wouldn't have been the masses of conversions after Constantine, and Christianity would not have become the state religion of Rome. If that hadn't happened, it would never have become the dominant religious, cultural, political, social, economic force that it became so that we wouldn't have even had the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Reformation or modernity as we know it. ... It all hinges on this claim the early Christians had that Jesus was God.

JESUS AND CHRIST

Messianic beliefs have been around for more than three thousand years, before the birth of Jesus. Messianic language is definitely not unique to Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The Messiah story was around, a thousand years before Judaism was founded. Messianic expectations by Jewish people were derived from Near Ancient East (ANE) religions that birthed the likes of patriarch Abraham. We can today easily Google these facts: Horus (3000 BC, in Egypt); Mithras (1200 BC in Persia); Attis (1200 BC in Greece); Krishna (900 BC, in India); Dionysus (500 BC, in Greece) – these were said to have had variations of - been born of a virgin; born on 25 December; had a

star in the East; performed miracles; died and resurrected; had twelve disciples; called Alpha and Omega; taught at age 12; had twelve disciples, etc. The Indian Messianic mythology surrounding Krishna is almost identical to Jesus's mythology. Most Christian apologetics tried very hard to come with all sorts of spins and conjecture to go around these facts. Some even go to the extent of saying, "Satan created these realities because He (Satan) knew Jesus was coming". Please; don't give this explanation to postmodern people! Postmodern Christians just have to resort to John's prologue and hymn (John 1:1-14) to understand the "ALLNESS OF THE COSMIC CHRIST" throughout the Ages.

Conservative bible scholars see continuity between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith; that, what the Christian movement came to believe about Jesus is consistent with what Jesus in fact said and did. Critical bible scholars see discontinuity, arguing that the New Testament documents and the creeds of the church paint a portrait of Christ that the historical Jesus would not have recognized and that stand in contradiction to what he actually said and did. Modern Scholars can only agree on two things about Jesus; He was born and was crucified on a Roman cross. The rest belongs to what Theologians have named, The Christ of Faith. All this information is now freely available, thanks to our Information Age. You can type any question on the Internet and spend your whole life finding salvation through knowledge. In today's Digital Age, KNOWLEDGE IS YOUR SALVATION!

Jesus lived such an exemplary life that his disciplines weaved superhero stories about him. The historical Jesus was not God or the Son of God. Jesus never called himself God or even Son of God. He called himself "Son of Man" more than seventy times in the Gospels. God was "met and engaged" in the person of Jesus, as Bishop Spong rightly points out. Bishop Song asks the twenty first century questions in the prologue: "Is it possible, Jesus, that we Christians are the villains who killed you? Smothered you underneath literal Bibles, dated creeds, irrelevant doctrines and dying structures?". If the church does not change, if it will not break from its tribal mentality in which it believes its own version of God is better than everyone else's, it will die out; says Bishop Spong.

A new Christianity is emerging from the death of the old supernatural forms of yesterday's Christianity, as Bishop Spong has so rightly observed in his classic, *Jesus for the Non-Religious*. Spong has suggested that we separate the human Jesus from the myth. Let us understand that what the Church has referred to as miracles, over the past two thousand years, were just, fictionalized composites of Jesus's parents, nature miracles were just interpretive signs, etc. He has suggested we then examine the original images of Jesus as the Son of Man, the Servant, the Shepherd, etc. Christianity will die unless it breaks out of the old tribal mentality upon which most religions are based. "Our God is better than yours." "We have better laws." "Our women are more dignified."

I never knew there was a person called John Shelby Spong in early 2007. I was introduced to the works of Bishop Spong by my dear friend; Bishop Jackson Khosa. This was after my spiritual awakening of 17 August 2007. I got intrigued by the notes; in the preface to his book. Spong says that throughout his professional life, He has followed the motto of his theological seminary; "*Seek the truth; come whence it may, cost what it will.*" Reading Bishop Spong's books and his weekly Internet feeds has become for me a comfort as much as learning experience. It's like coming home, digging down to the real Jesus, and lifting the weight off my shoulders of having to "believe" stuff. I'm not real good at believing, and religion seems to promote acceptance of the incredulous as some sort of Godly virtue, leaving me out in the cold. I had given up on God, given up on faith, and given up on Christianity, when I got introduced to Bishop Spong. On July 2011, I finally met Bishop John Shelby Spong face to face and we exchanged information. My spiritual life has never been the same, since then. I have now learnt that, Jesus really lived, and Jesus loved God. Jesus preached the Gospel of God. Jesus never preached his own Gospel. He delivered whatever He received from Abba (source). Jesus' dream of a God-controlled world turned him into a breaker of tribal boundaries, prejudices, stereotypes, even; religious boundaries. Jesus embraced God's desire to heal the world. The cross became a human portrait of the love of God. I began a journey that has today helped my to fall in love with a profoundly human Jesus.

Bishop Spong, like many other fellows and leaders within the Jesus Seminar, laments the doctrines of conservative Christianity that have given rise to the religious anger that fuels the hatred of women, homosexuals, and non-believers in the inerrancy of the Bible. He adds:

I submit that this constant onslaught of ecclesiastical negativity comes directly from our theistic portrait of God, who has been traditionally understood as a punishing parent figure. The themes of guilt and degradation have been hammered home to believers in millions of sermons and Bible tracts.

This religion-based anger is divisive and characterized by enmity for outsiders and strangers. A profoundly human Jesus offers another option. He is the breaker of tribal boundaries. He presented to his disciples and others a new and inclusive kind of life, outside of tradition and in solidarity with all people. Jesus was as the breaker of prejudices and stereotypes, and this makes him really relevant to our times when race, gender, and sexual orientation are the major areas where hatred divides people from each other. And, finally, there is Jesus as the breaker of religious boundaries, which was, of course, the thing that got him into so much trouble. On the explosive topic of Jesus's divinity, Spong concludes:

Jesus was not divine because he was a human life into whom the external God had entered, as traditional Christology has claimed; he was and is divine because his humanity and his consciousness were so whole and so complete that the meaning of God could flow through him. He was thus able to open people to that transcendent dimension of life, love and being that we call God.

I do not have space and time to delve deeper into Bishop John Shelby Spong's treatise on Jesus for The Non-Religious. I will however give this short summary on his thesis:

Christians have known for a long time that each of the gospel writers reworked the stories of Jesus to paint a portrait that met the needs and questions of each writer's specific audience. What Bishop Spong does is to hypothesize that the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) set their stories about Jesus to be read along with the Jewish synagogue yearlong series of readings:

People have long noted that Mark, Matthew and Luke all treat the public ministry of Jesus as being of one year in duration, while John says it lasted three years. We now see that this one-year was not the length of Jesus' public career, but the length of the Jewish liturgical year to which the stories of the life of Jesus have been attached.

Bishop Spong notes that the events of what we now call "Holy Week" could not have taken place in the Spring Season; as set in the gospels. Bishop Spong postulates that Holy Week originally occurred in the fall, but was set by the Gospel writers to coincide with the spring festival of Passover. In changing the setting, the gospel writers were trying to understand the death of Jesus as a new kind of Passover – a deliverance from bondage, and a journey from death to life:

The story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, celebrated by Christians today as "Palm Sunday," was said, at least by Mark, Matthew and Luke, to have occurred a week earlier [than Passover, which takes place in late March or early April], which would place it as early as mid-March. The problem this dating reveals is that there was little chance that there would have been leafy branches in that part of the Middle East so early in spring....

Matthew, writing some ten years after Mark, comes to [Mark's] reference to leafy branches and drops the word "leafy" from his text.... Luke, writing still later, ... omits both Mark's leafy branches and Matthew's bare branches, relating only the account of the people laying down their garments in the path of the procession....

John's gospel ... solved the leafy branch problem by saying that the crowd waved "branches of palm trees' – that is, the leaves of an evergreen tree (John 12:13). Most people are not aware that the branches carried in this procession did not become palm leaves until the last canonical gospel to be written, since we now call the day Palm Sunday and mark it with the carrying of palms in procession.

Bishop Spong concludes:

The original context of both the triumphal procession into Jerusalem and the fig tree story [Mark 11] were in a different time of the year, when branches have leaves and when fig trees produce figs. That possibility is encouraged when we look at the Jewish eight-day fall celebration of the harvest, known as

Sukkoth, also called the Festival of Tabernacles or Booths. In the observance of Sukkoth, worshippers processed through Jerusalem and in the temple, waving in their right hands something called *alulab*, which was a bunch of leafy branches made of willow, myrtle and palm. As they waved these branches in that procession, the worshippers recited words from Psalm 118, the psalm normally used at Sukkoth. Among those words were “Save us, we beseech you, O Lord.” “Save us” in Hebrew is *hosanna* or *hosanna*. That phrasing was typically followed with the words “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” (Ps. 118:25, 26, NRSV). One immediately recognizes that these Sukkoth traditions have been shifted from the fall to the season of the Passover and have been adapted to the Palm Sunday story, to meet the interpretive needs of the gospel.

Bishop Spong believes that although Jesus was killed by crucifixion, much of the narrative of the cross is not the “remembered history of eyewitness observers”; rather, the narrative of the cross is liturgical drama, created well after the fact and designed not to describe actual events but rather to help worshippers understand who Jesus was and why his death had a special meaning.

In the same way, the miracle stories, which according to Bishop Spong are often Old Testament stories set into Jesus’ ministry, are be read for their meaning, not for their historical accuracy:

Miracles in the New Testament are, time after time, simply a literary device to enable the gospel authors to talk about the in-breaking kingdom that is available to those who have eyes to see... Miracles represented the only way first-century Jewish people could stretch human language sufficiently to allow them to communicate what they believed they had encountered in Jesus... [Jesus] neither was nor is a miracle worker. He did not walk on water, heal the sick, or raise the dead.

Bishop Spong concludes:

The gospels need to be read for what they are. They are not the chronicles of a remembered history, but the proclamations of a community of faith designed to say that the yearned-for kingdom of God has dawned in Jesus.

In addition to understanding Jesus as the new Passover, the early Christians saw Jesus through other images from the Hebrew Scriptures such as Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), in which a lamb is sacrificed, and a “scape goat” takes away the sins of the people. Jesus was also understood through the Jewish term “son of man” which was originally a synonym for mortal, but later came to refer to a supernatural messianic judge who would inaugurate the Kingdom of God. The vicarious pain of the “suffering servant” from Isaiah helped the early Christians to understand the deep strength in Jesus’ weakness and powerlessness. The “shepherd king” from Zechariah ridded the temple of traders, and was sold for 30 pieces of silver – another story that became attached to Jesus. Noting these parallels, Spong writes:

It is hard to imagine or to recognize, given two thousand years of literalism, just how little the gospel writers were concerned about historical accuracy [which is a modern concept]. They passionately wanted to interpret the experience they had had with Jesus and so, without apology or qualms of conscience, they told their stories with references out of the Hebrew scriptures and heightened the tales of heroic figures from the Jewish past when they applied them to Jesus.

Once Bishop Spong has made his case that the stories of Jesus were mostly interpretive accounts rather than historical recollections, Bishop Spong is free to take a new look at the stories, asking what they were intended to say about Jesus:

My task is not to breathe artificially the symbols of yesterday. They are, in my opinion, neither worthy nor capable of respiration. My task is to enter the experience that gave birth to these now dated and dying symbols and then to find words appropriate to my worldview to convey the power of the Jesus experience.

This reworking of the biblical images is done in the final chapters of the book as Bishop Spong looks at Jesus as “*The Breaker of Tribal Boundaries*,” “*The Breaker of Prejudices and Stereotypes*,” and “*The Breaker of Religious Boundaries*.” Bishop Spong understands the divinity of Jesus as arising from the fullness and depth of Jesus’ humanity:

Jesus is what God is, because in the fullness of Jesus' humanity we can experience what it means to live beyond the barriers of our evolutionary past and soar into a humanity that is spirit-filled, open to the source of life and love and what Paul Tillich called, as his name for God, the "ground of being."

Bishop Spong understands Jesus to be an incarnation of what it means to be fully human:

Jesus acted out of his whole and free humanity, revealing a life not bound by human survival needs, unwilling to participate in the security-building prejudices that enhance one by diminishing another.... There is salvation, I believe, in the fully human Jesus who reveals what human life can be, an existence free of tribal boundaries, free of prejudice, free of sexism and free of fear.

In the final chapter, Bishop Spong reworks the symbol of the cross from *"a sign of the theistic deity's sadistic nature, which required the sacrifice of the son to pay the price of sin."*

The traditional way we tell the Christ story makes an ogre out of God, a victim out of Jesus and angry people who must be eternally grateful and thus helplessly dependent out of us. That cannot ever be the "good news" of the gospel, nor can it be an expression of the love of God.

In place of the traditional understanding of the cross, Bishop Spong paints the cross as a "Portrait of the Love of God":

He was betrayed but he loved the betrayer. He was forsaken but he loved those who forsook him. His arrest was challenged but he demanded that his defenders put up their swords. He was falsely accused but he was silent in the face of his accusers. There was nothing defensive about him. Even when he was mocked and tormented, he loved his mockers and tormentors. He was scourged and he loved his scourges. He was denied and he loved his denier. He was crucified and he loved his killers. Hostility and rejection, abuse and death – these did not diminish his humanity. This is a portrait of a fully human one who has no need to hate or to hurt... a whole person, one who possessed his life so fully that he could give it away.

Bishop Spong closes the book with these words:

The call of God through Jesus is a call to be fully human, to embrace insecurity without building protective fences, to accept the absence of peace of mind as a requirement of humanity.... This is surely what the author of the Fourth Gospel meant when

he quoted Jesus as proclaiming that his purpose was *“that they might have life and have it abundantly”* (John 10:10).

Just like Dr. Robert Funk, founder of the Jesus Seminar, demanded a few years ago; both God and Jesus need a demotion. They need to leave heaven and find residence inside the hearts of man and women. A profoundly human Jesus inspires a new era of honesty in the practice of Christianity. We will discover that a human Jesus renews faith instead of undermining it, as claimed by critics. A human Jesus makes it possible for human beings like us to aspire and grow into the divine, just like the historical Jesus. The trajectory of the ancient wisdom of Jesus can be grasped in our contemporary world, and can find life in the thinking and practices of A New Church that is rising from the ashes of dogmatic Christianity. Just like the historical Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey, the new understanding of Jesus as profoundly human; will usher God’s Kingdom on our new earth. This is the Jesus post-modern people can relate with. If this Jesus does not find a place within the “inn” of the traditional Church, then our Digital Age will accommodate him. In a strange paradox, millions of people are rejecting Jesus, the ‘Son of God’ and embracing Jesus the ‘Son of Man’. Whether we are taking the apocalyptic or non-apocalyptic view, virtually all scholars see Jesus as a participant in the Jesus wisdom tradition.

Jesus’ dream of a Kingdom of heaven on earth, and his humanitarian solution for inaugurating that Kingdom, is my inspiration for writing this book. I love church buildings, I love music, and I especially love church music, but when it comes to the *real* Jesus, he’s hardly limited to Church buildings; no matter how pretty the stained glass. It is for this reason that you have this book in your hands. Take this as sign. Let it be a sign that calls you to be a part of the new thing God is doing in the universe.

Jesus represents a radical break from the tribal, patriarchal, xenophobic Judaism of the first century. Jesus welcomed women as well as men as his disciples. He preached to Gentiles as well as Jews, and many of his parables (like the Good Samaritan) sought to universalize human compassion and personal obligation. If Jesus didn’t literally heal the sick, he certainly showed deep concern for their plight. He commiserated with the outcasts of

Jewish society. In short, the “real” Jesus, in Spong’s view, was a revolutionary lover of all mankind who wanted to teach us that we’re all human together and that what matters most is loving one another and being good to one another.

This was never Jesus’ teaching. He spoke of the Good Samaritan — and Samaritans were hated and considered unclean by Jews. “Good” Samaritans? You must be kidding! Jesus spoke with women. He touched lepers. He healed the sick, at a time when the sick; were considered to be possessed, by demons. Jesus’ message was that God is for everyone. Christians didn’t hold onto that very long. Pretty soon they were oppressing blacks (while forcing them to become Christians), killing Jews, hating Muslims. What happened? It’s time to get back to that wholly human Christ, Spong says. That’s what made Jesus divine; the fact that he was totally human. So human he could give his life away willingly.

Of the many recent books on the historical Jesus, none has explored what the latest biblical scholarship means for personal faith. Now, in *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*, Marcus Borg addresses the yearnings of those who want a fully contemporary faith that welcomes rather than oppresses our critical intelligence and openness to the best of historical scholarship. Borg shows how a rigorous examination of historical findings can lead to a new faith in Christ, one that is critical and, at the same time, sustaining. “Believing in Jesus does not mean believing doctrines about him,” Borg writes. “Rather, it means to give one’s heart, one’s self at its deepest level, to ... the living Lord.”

Drawing on his own journey from a naive, unquestioning belief in Christ through collegiate skepticism to a mature and contemporary Christian faith, Borg illustrates how an understanding of the historical Jesus can actually lead to a more authentic Christian life—one not rooted in creeds or dogma, but in a life of spiritual challenge, compassion, and community.

In straightforward, accessible prose, Borg looks at the major findings of modern Jesus scholarship from the perspective of faith, bringing alive the many levels of Jesus’ character: spirit person, teacher of alternative wisdom, social prophet, and movement founder. He also reexamines the major stories of the Old Testament

vital to an authentic understanding of Jesus, showing how an enriched understanding of these stories can uncover new truths and new pathways to faith.

For questioning believers, doubters, and reluctant unbelievers alike, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* frees our understanding of Jesus' life and message from popular misconceptions and outlines the way to a sound and contemporary faith: "For ultimately, Jesus is not simply a figure of the past, but a figure of the present. Meeting that Jesus—the living one who comes to us even now—will be like meeting Jesus again for the first time." – says Marcus Borg.

DEMYTHOLOGIZING JESUS

During World War II a leading New Testament scholar, Professor Rudolph Bultmann (1884-1976), wrote that, "The Christian message had become incredible to modern humankind because it pre-supposed a mythical world which now belongs to past history.". He asked what possible meaning could be given to such phrases of the creed as "descended into hell" and "ascended into heaven", when "there is no longer any heaven or hell in the traditional sense of the words. He argues that it was a matter not of eliminating these terms and concepts but of interpreting them. Bultmann proposed a programme of "demythologising", a word he coined to refer to the task of re-interpreting the essential message of Christianity into thoughtful forms appropriate to the world in which we live – that is the global world. He described in detail the New Testament "mythology" that in his estimation needs to be eliminated. I have decided to enlist only twenty (20) items, from the many, that Bultmann suggested that they needed to be interpreted in order for the essential message of Christianity to be understood by the postmodern man:

1. The Pre-existence of Jesus Christ
2. The literal virgin birth of Jesus Christ
3. The literal deity of Jesus Christ
4. The doctrine that says Jesus Christ died for our sins
5. The substitution death of Jesus Christ through his blood
6. The literal resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead
7. The literal ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven
8. The literal return of Jesus Christ in glory

9. The final judgment of the world
10. The literal existence of spirits, good or evil
11. The personality and power of the Holy Spirit
12. The doctrine of the Trinity
13. The doctrine of the Son of God
14. The doctrine of God the Father
15. Death as a consequence of sin
16. The doctrine of the Original Sin
17. The fall of man from perfection to sin
18. The teaching on good angels and evil demons
19. The reign of a literal Satan on earth and the very existence of such a deity
20. The three-storied world of heaven above, earth on the ground floor, and hell underground.

This is quite a formidable list! This list is what is traditionally called the “foundations of classical Christianity”. These are the core tenets of Christianity and many will rightfully question how Christianity could have a future without them. These myths have formed the essence of Christianity as we have known it over the past two thousand years.

Christianity has indeed been sustained and immensely satisfied by these myths for the past two thousand years. Many Christians have suggested that there could never be effective gospel preaching (kerugma) without these myths. I beg to disagree as the preaching of the gospel has been continuing despite these myths. Postmodern theology demands the de construction and the re-mythologizing of these myths. Removing these “foundations” will amount to the total destruction of Christianity, some may say. Those who have identified their Christian faith with a literal reading of the Gospels will inevitably question whether one can continue to be a Christian without being a biblical literalist. I think the relevant question should be, “Can Christianity survive; over the next two millennia, with this kind of literal language?”

TOMORROW'S GOD

Dare to question, dare to test things, dare to seek, search, unconfined, God's embodied in your question. Already God has you in mind. Dare to question, dare to feel doubt, dare to take the path you chose, God's already deep inside you, closer than you dare suppose. Dare to question, dare to say "no" to far too glib replies. Dare to wait and dare to waiver; God will still be at your side. Dare to question, bold and fearless, God will still believe in you. Life in you is God's own purpose. Already God has you in view. Dare to question, doubt, and wonder, you are loved, by God retrieved, you are longed for, seen, discovered, free to live and to believe.

Tore Littmark

We have travelled far to understand that the universe we inhabit is largely a product of our own making. All our doctrines, creeds, and commandments are man made. We are the suppliers of meaning to the universe we inhabit. Even "God" – a very central symbol of meaning today, is entirely a human creation. Of all the symbols to which the human psyche has given birth in order to create meaning, by far the most important is the concept of God. The most important symbolic concept of spirituality that has been created, certainly for the Western world, is 'God'. We may feel inclined to refer to the ancient Greek gods (Zeus, Olympus, Uranus) as imaginary figures, because they are not part of our Western world. These gods were real figures just like our God, Allah, or Brahman became "real figures" to us. How do we say Zeus, Olympus, and Uranus are not real but God, Allah or Brahman, are real? Even St. Paul is said to have quoted poets who referred to Zeus in Acts 17:28, when they said, "In him we live, move and have our being". We can today, say the same thing that Greeks poets said about their imaginary gods. We made everything up! For our own survival; we must consciously create new meaning for our lives. This new meaning can only evolve out of our cultural past. I am convinced that the Christian tradition that I am so much fond of, can lead the human population towards a new world of meaning. The symbol "God" can become the new focus of meaning, provided we learn to use it very carefully and in an entirely new way. I am proposing that

the Christian tradition can help provide a focus of meaning or a new kind of religion for life in our Digital Age. We can't abandon the God symbol now. This symbol has survived too long into our Information Age. We just have to find new ways of using this symbol and where it points. Since our traditional path has collapsed, the moment has arrived for faith to open itself to the full meaning and reality of a global universe. We've truly entered a Post-Christian world.

Many Scholars and Philosophers credit the nineteenth century Theologian, Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872), for our postmodern understanding of God. It was Feuerbach who helped us understand that the concept of God originated as a class of mythical beings in ancient animism, which later became polytheism; this concept was subsequently and radically re-interpreted by Plato to be a universal concept. Christianity inherited its concept of God from a synthesis of Jewish faith and Greco-Roman culture, where it got mixed with Greek philosophical thought, during the first five hundred years of Christian history. The humanity of Jesus was thus absorbed into his divinity. We are today replaying a 'DVD' that was played during the birth of The Axial Age around 800 BC. Professor Lloyd Geering has this to say about that period:

If the time were to come when people begin to ignore, despise or make fun of the gods, their religious significance would decline and disappear. Even if the gods remained part of the furniture of the human world, they would be a far less significant part. Such a time did come for the gods of ancient polytheism. It occurred at the Axial period and the process took different forms.

THEO IS DEAD – ELOHIM IS BACK!

"... BEFORE Me there was no God formed, Nor shall there be AFTER Me".

(Isaiah 43:10)

Animism is the oldest form of religion; it gave birth to spiritism, which gave birth to polytheistic gods in both Hebrew, Greek and Eastern traditions. The birth of the axial age around the year 800 BC; saw Hebrew Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc) Greek Philosophers (Homer, Xenophane, Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, etc.) vigorously question pre-axial gods (Zeus, Olympus, Uranus, etc.). These pre-axial gods were as REAL as Yahweh, God, and Allah, to

pre-axial age people. Apostle Paul quoted pre-axial poets who said, "In him we live, move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). They were talking about Zeus. History has shown us that once gods get questioned, they get to be replaced by new gods; anytime you observe stories of god/s begin to be questioned, they become replaced by new stories. The universe we inhabit is largely a product of our own making.

HEBREW PROPHETS

Greek Philosophers, Hebrew Prophets, and Eastern Mystics like Buddha, Lao Tzu and Confucius – rose around the same time (800-400 BC). The gods of Israel as a class of beings were banished in favor of one Supreme Being, an invisible spirit known only through speech. Hebrews allowed other nations to keep their gods, but they restricted their own worship to one god (Yahweh). Other nations were allowed to have their gods, but not Hebrews (Deuteronomy 6:5 & 5:7). The squabble between THEO & Israelites has always been about them & other gods? The Israelite narrative is a journey of people who were tempted to return to polytheism again & again. It was around 600 BC that Israelites finally developed a true Yahweh concept. However, they still retained the Hebrew word for 'the gods'; ELOHIM (in plural form). When the word ELOHIM was used to refer to gods of other nations, it was treated as *plural*, but when used to refer to Yahweh, it was treated as *singular* (and ONLY referred to the 'god' of the Israelites. The idea behind; - "BEFORE Me there was no God formed, Nor shall there be AFTER Me". – was to proclaim Yahweh as the only God who had any reality.

BUDDHISM

The Buddhist tradition, older than Christianity by 500 years, abandoned the concept of gods and offered us a pragmatic means of understanding human existence. Buddhists have demonstrated to us that gods are not indispensable to religion. Buddhism never went out of its way to deny the existence of gods. Buddhism simply ignored her primitive gods, and they eventually faded from Buddhist consciousness. Buddhists, Jains and Taoists have demonstrated to us that gods are not indispensable to religion. Buddhism, Jainism, and Taoism has now survived for 2500 years, without a concept of any

God or gods whatsoever. Buddhism has given comfort and enlightenment to millions of people. Millions more, are abandoning theism and prefer to call themselves Buddhist Christians. His Holiness - The Dalai Lama, today embodies what it means to live without God or gods.

XENOPHANE (570-480 BC)

Philosopher Xenophane was one of the popular Greek Philosophers to ridicule pre-axial age gods. Xenophane coined the now famous quote; "If horses had gods - their gods would be horses also". Philosophers (just like Israelite Prophets) replaced the plurality of gods as a class of superhuman beings with THEOS. This is where THEO-logy (god-talk) comes from. This was intended to be used as a personal name the way Zeus and Olympus were used as personal names. However, Greek Philosophers differed on the meaning of THEO.

SOCRATES (469-399 BC)

There is no proof that Socrates himself wrote anything. Most of whatever we know of him is through Plato's works like 'The Apology'. Socrates was morally, intellectually and politically against the Athenians. He believed that the gods existed and he was the divine missionary. Although whether or not he believed in the Olympian gods has been contested. He contested the Sophistic doctrine (virtue can be taught) and argued that successful fathers do not necessarily produce successful sons and that moral excellence was more a matter of divine bequest than parental upbringing. Socrates believed that one must concentrate more on self-development than on material things. He encouraged people to develop friendships and love amongst themselves. Socrates believed that humans possess certain basic philosophical or intellectual virtues and those virtues were the most valuable of all possessions. To act Good and to be truly good from within is different and virtue relates to the Goodness of the soul.

PLATO (429-347 BC)

For Plato, THEO was the essence of goodness, the creative source of everything, to whom was to be attributed the intelligent souls found in humans. He used terms like, 'forms' and 'universals' which were later misinterpreted into dualism. For Plato, 'forms' were eternal, invisible and behind what was tangible. By the time Jesus was born, Plato's beliefs were interpreted in a very dualistic manner of a separate heaven and a separate earth.

ARISTOTILE (384-322 BC)

For Aristotle, THEO was even less personal than for Plato. He saw THEO as a Prime Mover of the Cosmic World. The fact that Aristotle was a pupil of Plato contributed to his former views of Platonism, but, following Plato's death, Aristotle immersed himself in empirical studies and shifted from Platonism to empiricism. He believed all people's concepts and all of their knowledge was ultimately based on perception. Aristotle's views on natural sciences represent the groundwork underlying many of his works.

STOIC PHILOSOPHERS

There were also other Philosophers who contributed to the debate on what was to take the place of the now faded Greek gods of the pre-axial age. Stoicism is a school of Hellenistic philosophy founded in Athens by Zeno of Citium (334 – 262 BC), a Greek thinker from Citium, Cyprus. He taught the Stoic school of philosophy Athens, from about 300 BC. By the early 3rd century BC, Stoics presented their philosophy as a way of life, and they thought that the best indication of an individual's philosophy was not what a person said but how they behaved. Stoics provided a unified account of the world, consisting of formal logic, non-dualistic physics and naturalistic ethics. Of these, they emphasized ethics as the main focus of human knowledge, though their *logical theories* were of more interest for later philosophers.

Stoicism teaches the development of self-control and fortitude as a means of overcoming destructive emotions; the philosophy holds that becoming a clear and unbiased thinker allows one to understand the universal reason (logos). A primary aspect of

Stoicism involves improving the individual's ethical and moral well-being: "Virtue consists in a will that is in agreement with Nature." Stoics conceived THEO as the principle of rationality and order which pervaded all things. These are the Philosophers the Apostle Paul encountered in Acts 17. The various Greek gods represent simple names or manifestations of different aspects of the One; the Stoics understood each as an allegory or a myth, not as a reality in and of itself.

THE EVOLUTION OF LOGOS

Stoic Philosophers taught that, 'at the heart of all things was the universal principle, the "artistic fire" or Word known as *LOGOS*, which was closely tied to fate. It existed at the beginning of the universe, and it would bring all things back together in the end, perfecting all through the *LOGOS*. It is important to note that *LOGOS* evolved three hundred years before the birth of Jesus. Numerologists have read all kinds of conclusions into this. For Stoics, THEO was the unity of all reality and they merged *THEO* with *LOGOS* (reason). Stoic Greeks evolved words like epos, onoma, and rhema to refer to words. Logos came to mean something more than a word, something like 'reason', 'thought', 'reflection'. This word later came in derivatives like 'logic' and all areas of disciplined study whose name ends in '-ology'. Logos can now be rendered as MEANING as found in all disciplines using the logic ending with '-ology'. To say *LOGOS* (meaning) was in the beginning, as in the prologue to John (1:1), is to say that the drift towards meaning has been there from the beginning. Every person may share in the enlightening truth that *MEANING* (logos) brings into the universe it has made. *LOGOS* is thus the Divine Spark that births *ALL THAT IS!*

THE RETURN OF ELOHIM

In the Bible, ELOHIM was never a personal name. ELOHIM was always attached to the Patriarchs of Israel. In this case, God was never used as a personal name. Everyone could choose the Patriarch whose values they shared and adopt the Patriarch's God. There was – the god of Abraham, the god of Israel, the god of Jacob, David, Moses, etc. it referred to whatever values a person treated as supreme. When we talk about 'The God of Jesus', we are not referring to a

Supreme being seated above the canopy we call the sky. We are referring to the values that Jesus stood for, which are values of inclusion, those marginalized by religious dogma, justice and the poor.

Atheism first reared its head when both Israelites and Greeks rejected polytheistic gods. Atheism can now be defined as denying a particular way of understanding 'God'. In this sense, everyone is a relative atheist. Monotheism was birthed out of atheism. By turning against polytheism, both Israelites and Greeks were atheistic, as far as pre-axial gods were concerned. The early Christians were accused of atheism by followers of ancestral Roman gods. The monotheist, in turn, regarded their accuses as superstitious idolaters. We see parallels between now and the time of Christian origins, as there are also between the disintegration of the Christian west and the decline of the Roman empire. Today, objective theism is seen as idolatry and superstition. Jews, Christians, and Moslems see each other as lost or into 'atheism' in relation to their respective view of 'God'. Yahweh, God, and Allah don't share the same attributes.

Since Yahweh, God, and Allah don't share the same attributes, what's next? Jews cannot accept Christianity's Trinitarian idea of God, because to them, *Yahweh is one* (Deut. 6:5). They know that trinity is a Greek idea of gods. *Yahweh, God, and Allah* don't share the same attributes. Moslems say there is not God but Allah, and Christians and Jews are not supposed to confuse their gods with Allah.

The idea of a Christian God is a synthesis between *Greco-Roman mythology* and *Jewish mythology*. Jesus had to be understood as a "*Son of God*" by both Greeks and Jews. The very word *THEO-logy* suggests a Greek tradition that's very foreign to the Hebraic tradition. Since all three Abrahamic faiths cannot agree on what constitutes the Divine; we need a New Consciousness, A NEW STORY and A NEW GOD. There will however not be another God in the fashion of Theo. "*BEFORE Me there was no God* formed, Nor shall *there* be *AFTER Me*" – we look back with mystery at how Theo's prophecy has been fulfilled in our time!

Professor Lloyd Geering, in his very insightful book, *Christianity Without God*, has opened my eyes to understanding the post-Christian and post-theistic age we have entered. Geering's book has some extremely useful introductions on theological topics. For

example he offers a precise set of definitions of theism, atheism, deism, pantheism, panentheism and mysticism that is every theology teacher's dream. I found *Christianity Without God* to be a hopeful book. It recognizes and celebrates humanity and our potential for freedom, and the positive changes we have seen in the end of slavery, challenges to patriarchy, racism and heterosexism and a growing concern for the earth and all its creatures. Geering suggests that we still have far to go though, in taking responsibility for our world and our lives, and part of that human movement to freedom and maturity is a stream leading to Christianity without God.

OUR EVOLUTION HAS COME FULL CIRCLE

The earth is animated with the glory of God (**animism**) - Isaiah 6:3. In both the Hebrew and Latin traditions breath is derived from the word spirit. Breath-based spiritual practices have become postmodern *spiritism*. Like the Psalmist, we can truly say, "**WE ARE GODS**" (**ELOHIM**) - Psalm 82:6. As our Eastern brothers and sisters greet each other; together with them, we say **NAMASTE** (the god in me, as me - greets the god in you, as you).

The English word spirit (from Latin spiritus "breath") has many differing meanings and connotations, most of them relating to a non-corporeal substance contrasted with the material body. The word spirit is often used metaphysically to refer to the consciousness or personality. The Jewish word for wind is **RUACH** and the Jewish word for breath is **NEPESH**.

When we explore the deeper meaning of these words, we discover that they both were conceived to be mysterious in both their origin and their destination. _____ "The Spirit blows where it wills and you hear the sound of it, but you do not whence it comes or whither it goes," John (3:8). The Gospel writer went on to say, "So is everyone born of the spirit."

Theologian, Ludwig Feuerbach shocked the western Christian world in 1841 with what might be called in current terminology, the 'deconstruction' of Christianity, in his book, *The Essence of Christianity*. He set out to deconstruct the Christian language without any reference to supernatural forces. Feuerbach had in 1841 already sensed the radical cultural change beginning to take place. He spoke

of a coming of a new era in human history and the need for a new religion. Christian theology is based on a God who became a human being, and only a human being, in Jesus of Nazareth. Christian theologians did not know how to handle a God who became a human being, so they sent him back to heaven. Feuerbach emphasized the God who became man, that is to say the human God (Christ); this - and only this - is the only God that matters. We are no longer concerned with what God is in himself, but only with what he is for man. It has ceased to be Theology – it is essentially Christology; that is, religious anthropology. This is how He concluded:

We must replace the love of God by the love of man as the only true religion; the belief in God by the belief in man. My wish is to transform friends of God into friends of man; believers into thinkers; candidates for the hereafter into students of this world; Christians, who, by their own profession are half-animal half-angel – into men – into whole men.

THE EVOLUTION OF GOD

NOW we know that, during human history, definitions of God have been born, changed and died. The God who was thought to ride across the sky as the sun changed as our knowledge of the sun grew. More than ten thousand years ago, in *animism*, which is the earliest human religion, God was defined as multiple spirits in a spirit-filled world. These multiple spirits we believed to rule the human realm through a series of intermediary deities, the forces of nature: sun, wind, water, fire, thunder, and lightning. When we human beings moved into agricultural communities, God was defined in terms of the process of fertility. When we grew into tribes on our way towards nation states, God *evolved* into a tribal deity sitting on a throne (Olympus, Jupiter, Zeus etc.).

God was also defined as a capricious deity that had to be appeased through a host of blood sacrifices (animal and human). History has taught us that the word God has never been static; it has always been in a flux and *evolving*. Some form of belief in God has persisted over the course of human history. Our perspective of God changes as we *evolve* as humans. We do not have to apologize for the fact that our knowledge of every single conceivable thing is limited. Our ancestors, who wrote the Bible, wrote from a very

limited understanding also. They did their best in their limited understanding of issues. This is reasonably logical.

A SUPERMARKET OF 'GODS'

The word 'God' will continue to symbolize the values we find compelling, the goals we aspire to, and the meaning we seek in human existence. 'God' sums up, symbolizes and unifies all that we value. It is now very popular to read in Social Networks and to hear; "I AM THAT I AM" - "Christ within me" - "My Buddha nature" - "Atman" - "Allah within" - "God is within me" or "God is the mystery of the universe". 'God' refers to the sum total of all that concerns us most. In the return of ELOHIM (a plurality of gods) we now encounter a supermarket of gods. Which of the gods are you going to align yourself with? Every Fundamentalist is representing a certain type of a wrathful, angry, jealous and proud of it God. You become the God you believe in! You can go for an inclusive God, a liberal God, a Gay affirming God, the God of John Shelby Spong, Marcus Borg, Dominic Crossan, Neale Donald Walsch, Wayne Dyer, Don Cupitt, Lloyd Geering, Ludwig Feuerbach, Deepak Chopra, Jackson Khoza, Diana Butler-Bass, Brian McLaren..... *(just to mention those whose God I can call MY GOD)*

God is the mythical embodiment of all that one is concerned with in the spiritual life. In the life of the human Jesus of Nazareth, God became man (and only man), in order for the human community to be God (and only God). The doctrine of incarnation as it relates to Jesus of Nazareth, has vaster consequences than traditionally thought. It is not in the human person, Jesus of Nazareth, that 'God' is to be found incarnate, but in the human species as a whole.

GOD – A NEW FOCUS OF MEANING

The word 'God' may or may not continue to be used in the future, though it has been the central symbol of meaning to western spirituality. It will still be used for the next few generations, at least. The evolution of globalization is a process that cannot be held back nor slowed down. In her book, *The Body of God*, theologian Sallie McFague has suggested that the combined influence of post-modern science and Christian faith requires the construction of

a new model in which we see the universe as the body of God. The word 'God' does still remain a major significant religious symbol, even though it no longer refers to an objective spiritual being for the majority of people in our universe, except for literalistic minded fundamentalists of course.

The word 'God' has a function, but no content or meaning except that which we supply. Here some new MEANING for the Digital Age we are in today. God is Life; not some Life. God is Action, not some action but all Action. God is Power; not some power but all Power. God is Presence; not some presence but all Presence. There is only ONE POWER; – ONE Presence – ONE Spirit – ONE Knowing – ONE Infinite Intelligence. God is pure Spirit, filling all space. This pure Spirit animates your every act. There is a real you that lives in a real God and the two are one. To know this is to understand the secret of life. To realize this is to understand your relationship with the Divine Presence.

The Universal Spirit, which is God, operates through a Universal Mind, which is the Law of God. We are all surrounded by this Creative mind; it receives the direct impress of our thoughts and acts upon it. The Universal Mind is indestructible, absolute, and Self-existent. It is the One that manifests itself through all creation, but is not absorbed by Its creation. All human beings are individualizations of the One Spirit. The manifest universe is the body of God. God is not a person but God is personal to all who feel the Spirit's indwelling presence.

To realize that the Law of God is written in your own mind is to make available to you a power that can meet every need. God has been called by a thousand names, but you and I are to think of God as Life.

There is one Life, that Life is God; that Life is perfect; that Life is my Life Now; that Life is everyone's Life Now; that is your Life right now. **GOD IS THE LIFE THAT YOU ARE!** You are enfolded in God's Infinite Presence. *Wherever YOU are God is!*

Your TRUE ESSENCE is God, also called LOVE. God is the essence of who you are. If you go deep enough, you find that essence. God is not a mind construct to be believed by the mind. God is not an entity or a being in space. God is not a belief that can be accepted or

rejected. You enter God by entering THE NOW. You don't need time to enter THE NOW. You can do it NOW!

It seems like God has been in a gradual process of phasing Himself / Herself / Itself out of human consciousness, as an external deity that works on us. We know that in Jesus; God became man, in order for man to become God (according to Christian Theology at least). When Jesus became God, the process of DIVINIZATION has fully begun. Our ancestors said Jesus was THE FIRST BORN SON OF GOD. Like Jesus of Nazareth, we can loudly say, "I AND THE FATHER ARE ONE". We no longer conceive any separation between us and Divinity. We experience EVOLUTION day by day, as we evolve into the ultimate likeness of the Divine. The Divine is LOVE!

All of us! Nothing between us and God, our faces shining with the brightness of his face. And so we are transfigured much like the Messiah, our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful *as God enters our lives and we become like him*. 2 Corinthians 3:18 (Message Bible)

We are living at a time where millions and millions of Sons and Daughters of God are rising as THE COSMIC CHRIST.

So, the future of God is; God in us, for us, as us, manifesting and expressing through us!

We are right in on the edge of a New Awakening and A New Reformation. We are leaving behind an old story and embracing A NEW STORY! Whether you are conscious of it or not:

You and i are creating a new story - right now - right here!

As we look back at the gods conceived by human imagination to explain natural phenomena, let us remember that with our Christian God and its related beliefs, we are in the same place as our pre-Axial Age ancestors. We are living in a modern age of atoms, electrons, quarks, and black holes, in order to explain our modern phenomena. Our forefathers created; spirits, demons, Satan, angels, devils, and even gods, in order to construct meaning for their ancient world. It was during the Axial Age that, again, the concept of a monotheistic God was created by human being; to create meaning for themselves. Siddharta Gautama (who later became the Buddha), was the first person to break away from his own polytheist upbringing 500 years

before Jesus. He is today known as the founder of the Buddhist tradition, which has no concept of any God or gods whatsoever.

Today we know that 'God' is a word, or concept, which has had a long history in the course of which it has undergone some radical changes and has been understood in widely variant ways. God is the mythical embodiment of all that one is concerned with in the spiritual life. In the life of the human Jesus of Nazareth, God became man (and only man), in order for the human community to be God (and only God). The doctrine of incarnation as it relates to Jesus of Nazareth, has vaster consequences than traditionally thought. It is not in the human person, Jesus of Nazareth, that 'God' is to be found incarnate, but in the human species as a whole. According to Feuerbach, traditional Christianity has, unfortunately, denied the truth of incarnation, instead of affirming it; (by the way it had made Jesus divine and returned him to heaven, to sit at the right hand of God).

Martin Buber (who is Jewish) was aware of the post-theistic Age we have entered, when He suggested; that we need not give up on the word 'God' as a focus of spiritual meaning. Philosophers, Buber, Gordon Kaufman and Don Cupitt, have all suggested that, though the word 'God' can no longer be used to name an objective spiritual being, it can usefully continue to function as an ultimate point of reference or a unifying symbol. In his famous spiritual classic, *I and Thou*; Martin Buber insisted that God is not an objective being and it is idolatrous to speak about God in that way. As Buber said, 'God embraces but is not the universe; God embraces but is not the self. On account of this that is unspeakable, I can say Thou. On account of this there is; "I and Thou", there is dialogue, there is language, there is spirit, and there is in eternity, the word'.

Dr. Alan W. Watts had this to say about using God as an idol:

Religious ideas are like words - of little use, and often misleading, unless you know the concrete realities to which they refer. The word "water" is a useful means of communication to those who know water. The same is true of the word and the idea called "GOD". To discover THE ULTIMATE REALITY of life - THE ABSOLUTE - THE ETERNAL (GOD) - you must cease to try grasp it in the forms of idols. These idols are not just crude images, such as the mental picture of God as an old gentleman on a golden throne.

Idols are our beliefs, our cherished preconceptions of the truth, which block the unreserved opening of mind and heart to reality. The legitimate use of images is to express the truth, not to possess it. This was always recognized in the great Oriental traditions such as Buddhism, Vedanta, and Taoism. This principle has not been unknown to Christians, for it was implicit in the whole story and teaching of Christ. His life was from the beginning, a complete acceptance and embracing of insecurity.

CONNECTING WITH YOU

Does God have a future today? I believe God does have a future and I believe the future of God lies with mystics. Mystics are those who seek a direct experience of the Presence of God. They yearn to know God, to see God and to be one with God. There has always been Mystics, who have always plumbed the depths and scaled the heights of the soul's potential. Mysticism is not a belief or a philosophy; it is an experience that transforms one's soul. When your soul is transformed, you and God are no longer two, but ONE.

The fifteenth century Saint Catherine of Genoa experienced oneness as submersion in the ocean of God's love. She said, "My being is God, not by simple participation but by a true transformation of my being ... I am so placed and submerged in His immense love, that I seem as though immersed in the sea, and nowhere able to touch, see or feel aught but water. My ME is God, nor do I recognize any other except my God himself".

(1) Feel your inner body (2) Be Silent & Alert; then observe your mind. Silence brings you to STILLNESS. (3) Accept & surrender to the present moment as it is; don't JUDGE it as good or bad! --- These 3 portals will ALWAYS take you into THE NOW (GOD) - Where you are HOME & SAFE & RESTED!

WE ARE ALL FALSE TEACHERS

My intensive research on the 280 years of Early Church Fathers debates that took place before the current Bible canon was authorised in Nicea; has just shown me how the books that made it into the Bible did so to counter those regarded as False Teachers. Reading Paul, Peter, James and John's Epistles makes this very obvious. 1 John talks about DOCETISTS who left his fellowship due to

different BELIEFS (1 John 2:18,19). In various ways they all deal with False teachings in the early churches.

TODAY; any of us could be considered false teachers by people of other traditions, since neither of us are under papal authority established by apostolic succession (Roman Catholic) or the ecclesial authority of bishops recognized by the Orthodox communion, nor do we subscribe to Luther, Calvin, or Barth's theologies; nor do we honor the sabbath appropriately (Seventh Day Adventist), nor do we affirm the "second blessing" and speaking in tongues as the initial physical evidence of being baptized in the Holy Spirit (Assemblies of God). If you do speak in tongues, you are in error (according to Baptists), If you tithe you are in error and in greater error if you don't; Nor do we baptise by immersion once or three times, nor do we believe in the other Church's interpretation of scripture. Nor do we share the same concept about God. ALL these contrary views can be supported through some interpretation of the Bible. As Brian McLaren so clearly explains:

Texts don't exercise their authority until they are interpreted, and all interpretation involves the mind, values, and interests of the interpretive community in and for which the text is interpreted. So when people claim to be under the authority of the Bible, they may in fact be under the authority of an interpretive community's interpretation of the Bible, whether they realize it or not.

HERE'S A FEW THINGS TO PONDER:

(1) According to the Catholic tradition, a true believer is someone who believes in the authority of the Pope. In Protestantism, the Pope was replaced with the Bible (as authority) when Reformers took over. 500 years later, the Bible as sola scripture is now being replaced as a 'Paper Pope' the very same way the Pope was replaced 500 years ago. Everything has its own time. There was a time when the Bible had an authority of sola scripture, now its another time when the same Bible is no longer an authority. If I cannot trust the Bible with the very genesis of life, where else can I trust it?

(2) Defining people as heretics is a way of finding peace with your own beliefs and the current status quo.; Christian history has shown that all orthodoxies were heresies first. Our very Evangelical orthodoxy, that others define as Gospel Truth, was a heresy when it

was birthed in the 19th century. All heresies are destined to be orthodoxies and all orthodoxies began as heresies. Christianity was persecuted as a heresy and indeed atheism, in the 1st three hundred years of its existence.

(3) All new orthodoxies were born out of atheism to previous 'established' orthodoxies. We are right on the edge of the greatest awakening humankind has ever experienced. We are a generation experiencing our own EVOLUTION & transformation; from homo-sapiens to homo-spiritus (divine beings). We are experiencing the flowering of human consciousness. The Universe is going through a transformation. Christianity is transforming and shedding its dogma, beliefs, and creeds that can no longer be embraced by a postmodern 21st century generation.

AN EMERGING NEW AGE!

This is The Second Coming of Christ. Not ONLY one individual - like 2000 years ago. This is the emergence of millions and millions of Sons and Daughters of God across the universe and across all religions. This is The Age of The Spirit. The Age of Aries was The Age of The Father, and The Age of Pisces was The Age of The Son. The dawning Age of Aquarius brings us the awareness of God as The Holy Spirit and as The Divine Mother. This divine Feminine is destined to be exalted in both male and female. We are entering the next stage of human evolution; from homo-sapience to homo-spiritus. The Age of Aquarius is THE AGE OF THE SPIRIT!

2000 years ago, we entered the Age of Pisces; symbolized by the fish and missions. Colonization and a global pursuit of converting the whole universe became the characteristic of this Age. The Age of Pisces brought the awareness of God as the Son (a human being), who was revealed to us as The Universal Christ. When the human Jesus got fully integrated with The Christ, we were able to say, "Jesus the man, IS GOD". Jesus came to show us how to walk the path of personal Christhood as human beings, in order for us to realize the Son of God, the Christ, within ourselves.

We are leaving behind doctrines and dogmas of the Age of Pisces. We are leaving behind the doctrine of God. In the Age of Aquarius, God does not have a doctrine. Each one formulates the

doctrine of God as we walk along. Your doctrine or no doctrine is the correct one. The Prophet Jeremiah saw the full revelation of this Age 2500 years ago:

I will put my teachings inside them, and I will write those teachings on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will each person teach his neighbors or his relatives by saying, 'KNOW THE LORD.' All of them, from the least important to the most important, will know me.

Jeremiah 31:33,34

We have now arrived at a point where we can acknowledge that 'God' is a word, a very important word; a symbolic word. This word has no eternal reference that is open to public confirmation. Jews, Christians and Moslems, while all claiming to be monotheists, have never agreed on the question of who the true God is. They cannot agree on the attributes and qualities that fit the word 'God'. For Jews, God is the One who delivered their forbears from slavery, gave them the land of Israel, and providentially continues to preserve their identity. For Christians, God is the One who became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. For Muslims, God is the One who appointed Muhammad as the last of his prophets and through whom He delivered the Koran. These three traditions and attributes can never be reconciled with each other. For Christians, the attributes of Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Christianity vary. For Protestant Christians there are currently more than fifty thousand views of doing spirituality, each one claims a revelation from God. As John Macquarrie has well said:

There was a time in Western society when 'God' was an essential part of the everyday vocabulary... But in the West and among educated people throughout the world, this kind of God talk has virtually ceased. People once knew, or thought they knew, what they meant when they spoke of God, and they spoke of him often. Now, in the course of the day's business, we may not mention him at all. The name of God seems to have been retired from everyday discourse.

The New Focus of meaning for 'God' is – ALL IN ALL! To be ONE with God is to be ONE with ALL IN ALL. – This is the path that we humans have been travelling all along, to discover God as ALL IN ALL. May I close this book with my favorite mystic, Neale Donald Walsch, on *Tomorrow's God*:

1. *Tomorrow's God* does not require anyone to believe in God.
 2. *Tomorrow's God* is without gender, size, shape, color, or any of the characteristics of an individual living being.
 3. *Tomorrow's God* talks with everyone, all the time.
 4. *Tomorrow's God* is separate from nothing, but is Everywhere Present, the *All In All*, the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the Sum Total of Everything that ever was, is now, and ever shall be.
 5. *Tomorrow's God* is not a singular Super Being, but the extraordinary process called Life.
 6. *Tomorrow's God* is ever changing.
 7. *Tomorrow's God* is needless.
 8. *Tomorrow's God* does not ask to be served, but is the Servant of all of Life.
 9. *Tomorrow's God* will be: unconditionally loving, nonjudgmental, non-condemning, and non-punishing.
- (From *Tomorrow's God*, Atria Books, 2005)

PART TWO

DOING SPIRITUALITY THROUGH FACEBOOK

The following section contains most of the posts and notes i have been posting on facebook since 2010. More can be accessed on the notes section of my facebook wall, as well as on my personal website.

TO BE IN COSMIC CHRIST IS TO BE ONE WITH ALL!

In the beginning (before all time) was the Word (Christ), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God Himself. He was present originally with God. All things were made and came into existence through Him; and without him was not even one thing made that has come into being

(John 1:1-3 Amplified Bible)

ALL IS IN CHRIST!

The CREATION is IN Christ

The LIFE is IN Christ

The ACCEPTANCE is IN Christ

The REDEMPTION is IN Christ

The RIGHTEOUSNESS is IN Christ

The SANCTIFICATION is IN Christ

The HOPE is IN Christ

The SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS are IN Christ

The CONSOLATION is IN Christ

The PEACE is IN Christ

The EFFECTUAL PRAYER is IN Christ

The STRENGTH AND RICHES are IN Christ

The ETERNAL PURPOSE is IN Christ

The NEW CREATION is IN Christ

The PROMISES are IN Christ

The ESCAPE FROM CONDEMNATION is IN Christ

The ONE BODY is IN Christ

The PERSEVERENCE is IN Christ

The GATHERING INTO ONE is IN Christ

The NO SEPARATION is IN Christ

The PERFECT MAN AND WOMAN is IN Christ

The HELPERS TOGETHER are IN Christ

The CHURCHES are IN Christ

The DEAD are IN Christ

The NEW MAN / WOMAN is IN Christ

WE ARE COMPLETE IN CHRIST

BEFORE ABRAHAM WAS, I AM!

Now that we are beyond THE MAYAN AGE; we are also beyond THE MAYA (delusions, illusions, myths, etc.) that were part and parcel of this AGE. The MAYA AGE was itself subdivided into other AGES like Evangelicalism, Protestantism, Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Patristic, Apostolic, Historical Jesus, Greco-Roman, Babylonian, Persian, Syrian, Egyptian, Colonialism & Missions, etc.). In 2013; - There's a new RESURRECTION EXPERIENCE! This one is beyond any Imperial Domination; since the universe has also reached the end of Imperial Domination. We are collectively EXPERIENCING CHRIST; (or MOSHIACH for my orthodox Jewish friends) beyond dogma, creeds, and beliefs. We are going through the experience of THE COSMIC CHRIST! A NEW EXODUS IS UNDERWAY! - This time, it is an EXODUS from 2000 years and more of ancient PRIMITIVE AND MYTHIC BELIEFS! - BE PREPARED TO HAVE YOUR LONG CHERISHED BELIEFS CHALLENGED IN 2013!

CHRIST (or MOSHIACH) is not a man or a woman. Christ is not a historical figure who was born at a particular time in a particular Country, or of a particular religion. We know that "before Abraham was, I AM". Before Abraham, THE CHRIST IS! Even unto the end of the world, THE CHRIST IS!

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS WITHIN ME

Since the destiny inspired day of 17 August 2007, there is not a moment that goes by, where I do not think about God. On 17 August 2007 I discovered GOLD. After journeying and searching for forty-five years, I woke up that day to discover that EVERYTHING WITHIN ME. I became AWARE that God was not outside of me trying to come inside. This is what religions teach. It's part and parcel of beliefs! – God is WITHIN ME and YOU; expressing the LOVING God SELF through us, as us. From that day I heard the call to "Go out and express your God SELF"! I knew that JESUS was not outside human

beings trying to get in. I knew that JESUS speaks from WITHIN me; not from outside of me? This is the same with YOU! It is JESUS with us, in us, and expressing outwardly AS US! When you got born again, it was not an outward experience but an INWARD TRANSFORMATION? - Even if 'The Preacher' seemed to be 'outside' from us. EVERYTHING in our life is part of AN INWARD JOURNEYING! - The Second Coming of Christ is not something that happens from outside of us. It is the RETURN of The Kingdom that is WITHIN US.

EVERYTHING in our life is part of AN INWARD JOURNEYING! - The Second Coming of Christ is not something that happens from outside of us. It is the RETURN of The Kingdom that is WITHIN US. It is CHRIST resurrecting FROM WITHIN US; not something external to us. Evangelical Christianity got the idea of God and Jesus of Nazareth very badly wrong! *Can we dare to embrace the possibility that WE, ourselves, are; THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST?* The Second Coming of God who is present as the consciousness of every human being? Can we dare to embrace the possibility that we ourselves are; THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN RISING FROM WITHIN US? There is an awakening occurring in the world today, on a scale never before seen. It is the birth of the expanded consciousness, and it is found in those who acknowledge what is good and right, it is found in those with Love and a desire for Truth, those with empathy. The human brain is now READY for the next and FINAL STAGE of Human Evolution: GODHOOD (WE ARE GOD)! It is to those that are capable of accepting and understanding divine knowledge that I write today! They are ready for their Spiritual Evolution, they are almost ready, to stand in the Light and know God as themselves.

THE EARTH (OUR OUTER UNIVERSE)

Our outer universe has been in existence for at least 13,7 billion years; according to scientific estimates. Our universe began to form about 13.7 billion years ago, with an event called the *Big Bang*. Our planet *Earth* began to form about 4.5 billion years ago. Our Earth rotates around a medium sized star that we name the *Sun*. Our Sun is 93 million miles from the earth. The Sun is one of the largest and most massive objects in the solar system. The volume of the Sun is 1,299,400 times bigger than the volume of the Earth; *about*

1,300,000 Earths could fit inside the Sun. Our sun is but *one of the billions of stars in a galaxy* that we name the Milky Way. *The biggest star* inside the Milky Way, *Betelgeuse*, is *700 times bigger* than our Sun (and roughly 50 times as massive). The nearest star to our Sun is four light years away (the distance light can travel in one year) or about *25 thousand billions of miles away*. Within the *100 billion galaxies* in our known universe lies *100 billion universes* in the galactic black holes of our universe, with 100 billion more galaxies each containing another universe with more galaxies, and so on infinitely. Milky Way is just one of billions of galaxies in the universe. *Each galaxy contains billions of stars.* Most of what exists in the universe is invisible and known to exist because astronomers can measure its gravitational effect or its pull on other bodies. Bacteria (found in both the earth and the human body) are one of the least complex forms of life. Latest discoveries on *Quantum Physics / M-Theory / String Theory* - have made our universe MYSTERIOUS beyond comprehension.

A defining characteristic of *life* is its ability to heal itself and reproduce itself. Human-like beings (*genus Homo*) came into existence about *2.5 million years ago*. Either 5 or 8 species of *Homo* have been identified. Modern humans, (our particular species = *Homo sapiens*) emerged about *195,000 years ago*. About 98% of our DNA matches exactly the DNA of chimpanzees. *Self Conscious* human beings emerged about *50 000 years ago*. 6000 years ago, human beings evolved into higher states of Self Awareness, we became aware of our nakedness (Adam & Eve mythology). About 300 years ago human beings began to be conscious of themselves as creators, as free thinkers and as the universe conscious of itself (enlightenment period). The next level of human evolution is GOGHOOD; this is what UNIVERSAL SPIRITUALITY is all about. The Infinite outer universe is a macrocosm of the infinite inner universe (the human body).

THE HUMAN BODY (OUR INNER UNIVERSE)

Molecular biologists estimate that a human body contains anywhere from *75 to 100 trillion cells*. Each and every one of these cells contain hundreds of thousands of *molecules* with six feet of DNA

(deoxyribonucleic acid) in every cell containing *over three billion letters of coding*. Each cells does everything, from healing, providing structure and stability, to providing energy and a means of reproduction for an organism. Self -Therapy is one of the defining characteristics of our cells. We discovered DNA about fifty years ago and we learned that life is ONE connected, unfolding whole. We discovered that we are ONE in common with all living things: plants, vines, trees, insects, creatures of the sea, reptiles, mammals and other human beings. That shared connectedness is revealed in many things, but chief among them is that to be alive in any form is to be survival-oriented.

The DNA in our cells houses the genetic information necessary for directing cellular activities. Our pre-conscious, conscious, sub-conscious, and unconscious functions are embedded inside our cells. 96% of our actions flow from the sub-conscious part of our cells. Scientists have estimated that about 95% of all the cells in the body are bacteria. We are connected to everything: the event that birthed our cosmos, every star, every blade of grass, every creature and each other. As we connect with Christ, we connect more fully with everything and with everyone.

There are around 75 to 100 trillion cells in you making up your entire body, let me say that again 75 to 100 TRILLION cells! When you compare this to the 400 billion stars in our galaxy, you can contemplate just how much encompasses your existence. If you ever feel small, remember, there are more cells in your body than stars in our galaxy! The Cells in your body react to everything that your mind says. Every 7 years your body completely replaces itself. You are made of stardust. The carbon, nitrogen and oxygen atoms in our bodies, as well as atoms of all other heavy elements, were created in previous generations of stars over 4.5 billion years ago. The cells that make up your body are dying and being replaced all the time. So much so that as you read this sentence roughly 25,000,000 of your cells have died. But don't worry today you will make 300 billion more. This happens so often that every 7-10 years you have a completely new body of cells. If you have a completely new body every few years, 7 years ago, the body you have now did not exist, so if not your body then, *WHO ARE YOU?*

The *human body* contains more than *120 000 veins and arteries*. The human brain *brain* consists of about *100 billion neurons*. There are anywhere from *1,000 to 10,000 synapses for each neuron*. There are *1000,000 miles of blood vessels* in the brain. Neurons develop at the rate of *250,000 neurons per minute* during early pregnancy. Humans continue to make new neurons throughout life in response to mental activity. Your brain uses 20% of the total oxygen in your body. As with oxygen, your brain uses 20% of the blood circulating in your body. While awake, your brain generates between 10 and 23 watts of power—or enough energy to power a light bulb. Your brain processes about *70 000 thoughts each day*. Meditation practice is said to be able to reduce this number by half.

Human eyes are the most complex organs outside of the brain. Human eyes are composed of more than *2 million working parts*. Human retina contains *120 million rods for “night vision”*, and *8 million cones* that are color sensitive and work best under daylight conditions. A human eye can distinguish *500 shades* of the gray and can detect over *10 million colors*. While a fingerprint has 40 different unique characteristics *an iris has 256*. Human Eyes contribute towards *85% of total knowledge*, and eyes use about half of the brain function in the seeing process.

- We share over 60% of our genes with fruit flies.
- We share over 90% of our genes with mice.
- We share 96% of our DNA with large apes.

THE REVELATION OF GOD IS GOD DEEP WITHIN SCIENCE!

“In my opinion, science offers a surer path to God than religion”

Dr. Paul Davies - Philosopher and Physicist

Our first step to awakening to A HIGHER CONSCIOUSNESS... We need to realize how vast and awesome is the universe we live in. As we begin to comprehend our real status, our true story, we find that we are part of a much greater quantum consciousness field. Neuroscientists and Brain scientists are today explaining, how the trillions of synapses, neurons, and neural pathways inside our brains help us to feel TRANSCENDENCE and a sense of THE HOLY inside ourselves. Anyone (atheists included) can today MEDITATE and have

this feeling we use to call THE ANOINTING OF GOD. This is just an activity of the brain where we bring STILLNESS in our inner selves and experience THE CHILDLIKE BLISS we had before we were brainwashed by religions. BE STILL & YOU WILL KNOW!!!

MY CHRIST CONSCIOUSNESS – WHO DO YOU SAY CHRIST IS?

THE CHRIST (or MOSHIACH) is not a person, but A PRESENCE. We are living in a day and age where YOU will catch a vision of THE CHRIST that you will not even be able to explain to anyone else. ONLY you will fully understand that vision. You will KNOW; even in your deep sleep you will wake up knowing your ONENESS with this reality.

GOD IS LIFE. God is the eternal life of our being. This is what Jesus meant when He said, "I AND MY FATHER ARE ONE"; "I AM in the Father and the Father is in me"; "I AM The Way The Truth and The Life"; The semantics and names mean nothing. What counts is whether we can catch the same sense of or feeling of inner presence within ourselves; Fundamentalist Christians always quote Jesus in the Gospel of John saying "*I am the way. I am the life. Nobody comes into the kingdom of heaven except through me.*" But what does Jesus mean by "I"?" In his language, Aramaic, the word is translated as "*The I within the I.*" So he was speaking about himself as a universal spirit. In that case he can't be squeezed into a body or the span of a lifetime. These words are the most powerful and direct pointers to THE TRUTH, if understood correctly. *They don't speak of The Christ of the Christian religion. They don't speak of The Christ of creeds and dogma. They speak of The Christ that IS / (was) billions of years before the big bang exploded into the current universe. They speak of The, I AM that IS; - even before Abraham.*

He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation; for in him ALL THINGS were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities - ALL THINGS were created through Him and for Him. He is before ALL THINGS, and in Him ALL THINGS hold together. He is the first born from the dead, that in EVERYTHING He might be pre-eminent. For in him ALL the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him; to reconcile to Himself ALL THINGS; whether on earth or in heaven; making peace by his death on the cross.

Colossians 1:15-20

CHRIST CONSCIOUSNESS speaks of the INNERMOST I AM; MY SILENT WITNESS! The essence identity of every man and woman; every life form; It speaks of the life that I AM! - Can we touch our inner selves; our REAL SELF / HIGHER SELF? The Chinese mystic, *Lao Tzu*, caught the vision and called it *the Tao*; Lord Krishna of India called it *Atman* (the indwelling God); Moses called it I AM; Abraham called it A FRIEND; Jewish mystics call it HASHEM; Jesus called it FATHER; Ramakrishna called it MOTHER KALI; Sufis call it THE ALLAH WITHIN; Buddhist mystics call it *OUR BUDDHA NATURE*. Christian mystics call it *THE FATHER WITHIN*; The Apostle Paul caught this as *THE CHRIST WITHIN*. In CHRIST; there are no Atheists, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Agnostics, etc. IN CHRIST; there is ONLY consciousness expressing itself as ALL of the above. The Holy Spirit speaks and acts on ALL - ALL the time (regardless of what Evangelical Theology says). Anger and Idolatry are Siamese twins. Our greatest IDOLATRY is *the idolatry of words*, we use language and words to separate others from *THE KINGDOM OF GOD!* - *THE COSMIC CHRIST (second coming of Christ) demolishes every foundation, belief and creed of the past 2000 years! It actually brings an end to Christianity as we know it. The first coming of Christ ended Judaism as it was known then!*

The nature of the Universal Mind is *Omniscience* (all knowing), *Omnipotence* (all powerful), *Omnificence* (all creative) and *Omnipresence* (always present). Know that this too is your nature. You have access to all knowledge, known and unknown; you have access to an infinite power for which nothing is impossible; you have access to the limitless creativity of the One Creator. All these attributes are present within you at all times in their potential form. In a nutshell, there is a single Consciousness, THE UNIVERSAL MIND; which pervades the entire Universe. *It is All Knowing, All Powerful, All Creative and always present everywhere at the same time. Your consciousness is part of it - IT IS IT! - All is ONE!* You are connected to everything and every one. You are already connected to what you want. To the degree that you truly comprehend and internalize this Truth, *you will be able to become the master of your mind and the director of your life.* The Universal Mind goes by many names. In the scientific world we know of the Unified Field, in spiritual philosophy we refer to THE ALL or UNIVERSAL CONSCIOUSNESS and in religion

we call upon God who Himself goes by many names - *Jehovah, Allah, Buddha Nature, Atman and Brahman* to mention but a few. The name is relevant only in so far as it resonates with you.

THE AGE OF MOSHIACH

The Jewish Prophet, Jeremiah, saw this age *2500 years ago*. He saw an AGE where the need to BELIEVE IN GOD will be no more. He saw an AGE where everyone, the old and the young would KNOW:

"...I will put my instructions DEEP WITHIN them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. - AND, they will not need to teach their relatives, saying, 'You should know the Lord'. For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will KNOW me already,"

Jeremiah 31:33,34

A German Jesuit Theologian, *Karl Rahner (1904-1984)*, said;

"The Christian of the future will be a mystic or He/She will not exist at all"

The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It will transcend a personal God and avoid dogma and theology....That which is impenetrable to us really exists. Behind the secrets of nature remains something subtle, intangible and inexplicable. Veneration for this force beyond anything that we can comprehend is my religion.

Albert Einstein (1879-1955)

Through THE COSMIC CHRIST, we, as a people, are REDEFINING humanity. We are learning an ancient biblical lesson: *In Christ* there is neither Jew nor Gentile, Democrat nor Republican, male nor female, gay nor straight, black nor white, bond nor free; IN CHRIST; there is no Christian, Buddhist, Moslem, Hindu, Taoists, etc. There is simply A NEW HUMANITY; A Humanity without barriers or boundaries, celebrating all that humanity can be.

Ladies & Gentleman; we are living at a time where BELIEFS are being replaced by INNER KNOWING! - The NEED to BELIEVE IN GOD falls away when God has become A PRESENCE in which; I LIVE, MOVE, AND HAVE MY BEING (Acts 17:28). This PRESENCE is much closer than the breath I take. God has left the "heaven" we imagined; *to live in us, amongst us, as us*. The expansion of

knowledge and the march of time have ejected the sky God from human consciousness. This is what the END OF MAYA was all about. It was the END OF OUR MAYA (delusions, sleep, illusions) WORLD! It was about the END of crutches that we needed for the past ten thousand years and more. *Religious beliefs* were the crutches. Some people will still need religious beliefs for some time (these people need our grace and understanding), but they'll eventually evolve into higher consciousness and rid themselves of BELIEFS.

LIKE *JOSHUA* DECLARED A MOMENT OF CHOICE, 3000 YEARS AGO; - *IT'S TIME TO CHOOSE* BETWEEN YESTERDAY'S TRIBAL, VENGEFUL, VINDICTIVE, WRATHFUL, AND ANGRY GOD - OR - THE UNIVERSALIST GOD BEHIND THIS LOVE REVOLUTION!
"CHOOSE YE THIS DAY WHOM YOU WILL SERVE!"

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES KAIROS WE LIVE IN PART ONE

MY DEEPEST ME IS GOD!!!

The current **NEW REFORMATION** the Universe is going through is a replay of the *Ancient ABRAHAMIC CALLING* (Gen. 12). Whether there was a REAL PERSON called ABRAHAM is not important (The Prodigal Son and Good Samaritan parables are great and *TRUTHFUL* parables, even though their characters never existed in real life). Human beings all over the Universe and across ALL RELIGIONS are being called out of THE GOD WE KNEW (or thought we knew).

Our Christian Tradition; IN JESUS; GOD BECAME A HUMAN BEING, IN ORDER FOR HUMAN BEINGS TO BECOME GOD. Desert Monks and Patristic Fathers stated this *THEOSIS* (Divinization), since the day of Jesus:

- **St. IRENAEUS of LYONS** (130-202 AD): *"God became what we are in order to make us what He is himself."*
- **St. CLEMENT of ALEXANDRIA** (150-215 AD): *"He who obeys the Lord and follows the prophecy given through him, becomes a god while still moving about in the flesh."*
- **St. ATHANASIUS** (296-373 AD): *"God became man so that men might become gods."*
- **St. GREGORY of NAZIANZUS** (330-390 AD): *"Become gods for (God's) sake, since (God) became man for our sake."*
- **St. CYRIL of ALEXANDRIA** (376-444 AD): *"We are called 'temples of God' and indeed 'gods', and so we are."*
- **St. BASIL the GREAT** (329-379 AD): *"Becoming a god" is the highest goal of all.*
- **St. AUGUSTINE** (354-430 AD): *- "God is more intimate to me than I am to myself"*
- **St. CATHERINE of GENOA** (1447-1510 AD): *"My deepest me is God!"*
- **St. JOHN of the CROSS** (1542-1591 AD): *"The soul is God; rather than the soul only"*

- **MEISTER ECKHART** (1260-1328 AD): *“The eye through which I see God is the same eye through which God sees me; my eye and God's eye are one eye, one seeing, one knowing, one love.”*
- **THOMAS AQUINAS** (1225-1274 AD): *“The gift of grace makes us partakes of the Divine Nature”*
- **KARL RAHNER** (1904-1984 AD): *“The process of Divinization is the centre of gravity”*
- **JESUS** (04BC-33 AD): *“The Father and I are one” and “You are gods”;*

BIBLICAL SUPPORT:

- **2 Peter 1:4:** *“...You are partakers of the Divine Nature”*
- **Romans 8: 14:** *“The Spirit joins our Spirit to affirm that we are Sons of God”*
- **Romans 16:20:** *“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet”*
- **Galatians 2:20:** *“It is no longer I that lives, but Christ lives in ME”*
- **1 Corinthians 6:2 – 3:** *“Someday we believers will judge the world”*
- **2 Corinthians 3:17-18:** *“We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the SAME IMAGE from one degree of glory to another.*
- **Psalms 82:6 & John 10:34:** *“You are gods”.*

GOD IS DOING A NEW THING (Isaiah 43:19)! – The Divinization of the universe today, was long prophesied:

“...I will put instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people ... And, they will not need to teach each other “know the Lord” – Everyone from the least to the greatest, will know me already”.

Jeremiah 31:33

The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It will transcend a personal God and avoid dogma and theology...That which is impenetrable to us really exists. Behind the secrets of nature remains something subtle, intangible and inexplicable. Veneration for this force beyond anything that we can comprehend is my religion.

Albert Einstein (1879-1955)

OLD ADAM AND NEW ADAM

Adam is the symbol of the whole human race in its present natural state, so Christ is the symbol for what the whole human race can yet become as God becomes enfleshed (incarnated) within it. This is why Paul Tillich spoke of Christ as the symbol of the NEW BEING! Even the Book of Revelation envisaged a time when the divine presence would depart from 'heaven' and dwell among people (Rev. 21-2-3). The Christian twin-doctrines of Incarnation and the Holy Trinity already spoke of the divine becoming enfleshed in the human and human becoming embodied in the divine.

The Christian world has already become adjusted to the symbolic character of the creation myth and the story of Adam. It is commonplace today to say that Adam is not an historical figure but a symbolic embodiment of the human condition. In Adam (which is Hebrew for 'humankind') we are to see EVERYMAN. "For in Adam ALL die, so also in Christ shall ALL be made alive..... The first Adam was a living being; the last Adam became A LIFE GIVING SPIRIT... The first Adam was from the earth, a man of dust, the second Adam is from 'heaven'" (1Corinthians 15:22, 45, 48)

"God does not exist; God is BEING itself beyond essence and existence. Therefore, to argue that God exists is to deny God"

Theologian Paul Tillich

THE EVOLUTION OF GOD IN HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS

During human history, definitions of God have been born, changed and died. The God who was thought to ride across the sky as the sun changed as our knowledge of the sun grew. More than ten thousand years ago, in *animism*, which is the earliest human religion, God was defined as multiple spirits in a spirit-filled world. These multiple spirits we believed to rule the human realm through a series of

intermediary deities, the forces of nature: sun, wind, water, fire, thunder, and lightning. When we human beings moved into agricultural communities, God was defined in terms of the process of fertility. When we grew into tribes on our way towards nation states, God *evolved* into a tribal deity sitting on a throne (Olympus, Jupiter, Zeus etc.). God was also defined as a capricious deity that had to be appeased through a host of blood sacrifices (animal and human). History has taught us that the word God has never been static; it has always been in a flux and *evolving*. Some form of belief in God has persisted over the course of human history. Our perspective of God changes as we *evolve* as humans. We do not have to apologize for the fact that our knowledge of every single conceivable thing is limited. Our ancestors, who wrote the Bible, wrote from a very limited understanding also. They did their best in their limited understanding of issues. This is reasonably logical.

The word God is not about *a being*, it is a signpost for a sense of transcendence that we encounter within time and space. Our misunderstandings occur when we use the language of time and space to give form to an experience and a reality that is not bound by time and space. Let us allow GOD / ULTIMATE REALITY, CONSCIOUSNESS or whatever understanding of THE HOLY we hold, to *evolve*. In the Hebrew Scriptures, God is identified with wind and breath, concepts that eventually *evolved* into the word Spirit. God was identified with love, as the expander of life, and *evolved* into the understanding of the Christ figure as "love incarnate." God is also identified with the idea of "rock" and evolved into the Ground of Being that we identify with the old patriarchal word, "Father".

In time and space, God can be experienced, but not realistically defined. I do not believe that in the last analysis any human being can actually define or redefine God, whether we call God the Holy, the Universe, the Sense of Transcendence, ALL THAT IS or anything else, but I do believe we can experience this presence and I do believe it is real. When we experience this presence I know of no other way to describe it except as "*God*." In the final analysis, we can ONLY know the God of our own experience, and not another's experience. We humans have acquired more complex brains that throw up many obstacles and insecurities along the road we travel;

hence we developed religion as a coping mechanism. Religion is a method of reminding us of our origin – out there in “the heavens”, where the forces of physics never sleep nor slumber. We need to keep on reformulating religion for the sake of the coming generations. The older lens through which most of traditional Christianity still views the Bible has made Christianity incredible and irrelevant to many postmodern people.

I no longer see God as either a heavenly parent or a heavenly judge dispensing rewards and punishments to obedient or disobedient children according to their deserving. This rather juvenile God died centuries ago, the victim of a revolution in thought that produced the modern consciousness. This revolution was ignited by Copernicus, Kepler and Galileo during a 300 year period called The Enlightenment - they together shattered God’s dwelling place above the sky and rendered the primitive God of the childhood of our religion to be “homeless.”

We desperately need a new consciousness; a new awakening;

A new way to think about god!

Christ must be born again; He must be re-incarnated in a world that has become different from the one in which He lived!

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) - Jesuit Theologian

MY PROPHECY!

WHEN THIS NEW REFORMATION IS OVER WITH – ALL OF US WILL BE "ATHEISTS"! – WE WILL LOOK DEEP WITHIN EACH OTHER TO FIND GOD – WE WILL SEE GOD IN EACH OTHER – WE WILL SEE GOD FACE TO FACE – WE WILL THEN KNOW THAT WE ARE HOME, RIGHT HERE ON EARTH!

WE ARE THE ONE WE’VE BEEN WAITING FOR! – The Second Coming of Christ is not happening exactly the way our EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY taught us! – The First Coming didn’t happen the way Jews expected it to happen anyway!

- SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF GOD ARE HERE!
- THE END OF ALL BELIEF SYSTEMS IS HERE!
- THE NEW EARTH IS HERE!
- THE NEW AWAKENING IS HERE! – YOU KNOW IT!!!

“ ...you know how to discern the appearance of the **sky**, but cannot discern the signs of the times?” – Matthew 16:3

The Sons of Issachar are described in I Chronicles 12:32 as:

“men who understood the times and knew what Israel should do.”

If WE are to arise and fulfill her destiny in the heart of God in this hour, the wisdom of the Sons of Issachar must characterize the Church of our generation as well.

NAMASTE!!!

THE HIGHEST AUTHORITY LIES INSIDE OF YOU!!!

The Teacher of Teachers is within *YOU!*

YOU do not have to wander around the world to find a great Teacher, a Prophet, or a Guru.

YOU are the one who must *ask* yourself the most important questions of life.

YOU are the one who must *answer* the most important questions of life.

YOUR BODY IS THE TEMPLE OF THE HOLY - WHICH IS YOU!!!

BELIEVE NOTHING JUST BECAUSE A SO-CALLED WISE PERSON SAID IT

BELIEVE NOTHING JUST BECAUSE A BELIEF IS GENERALLY HELD

BELIEVE NOTHING JUST BECAUSE IT IS SAID IN ANCIENT BOOKS

BELIEVE NOTHING JUST BECAUSE IT IS SAID TO BE OF DIVINE ORIGIN

BELIEVE NOTHING JUST BECAUSE SOMEONE BELIEVES IT

BELIEVE ONLY WHAT YOU – AND ONLY YOU – TEST AND JUDGE TO BE TRUE

THE BUDDHA

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES WE LIVE IN - PART TWO

"If you wish to strive for peace of soul and happiness, then BELIEVE; If you wish to be a disciple of truth, then ENQUIRE"

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900)

My take on our evolution over the past 2000 years:

Before Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity as a Religion of The Roman Empire; Christians were called Atheists because they were not part of Judaism and did not worship Roman gods. Ancient Rome saw the spread of Christianity as the spread of unbelief, while Christians saw it as a move away from paganism and superstition. Things changed after Christianity became *a Religion of the Roman Empire in 312 AD*.

FALL OF ROME 476 AD – A barbarian by the name Odoacer (a Germanic leader in the Roman army), deposed the last western Roman Emperor, Romulus Augustus. This plunged the Western world into 700 years of the ‘dark ages’ and resulted in monasticism that lasted until the end of the dark ages.

THE GREAT SCHISM (1054 AD) – Relations between the Greek speaking Eastern of the Byzantine Empire and the Latin speaking Western traditions within the Christian Church reached a terminal crisis. This crisis led to the separation between the Eastern and Western churches and is referred to as the Great Schism of 1054. The Christian Church split along doctrinal, theological, linguistic, political, and geographic lines. The modern Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches were born in 1054. Eastern Orthodox Christians saw themselves as the one’s who stood for *GENUINE RELIGION*. This opened the way for the Renaissance revolution.

RENAISSANCE (12-15TH century) – Leaders of the Renaissance included William of Ockham (1300-1349); Marsilius of Padua (1280-1343); Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) & others. They challenged the mighty Catholic Church & prepared the way for Reformation to occur. The Renaissance had its own Prophets in the mystics of Meister Eckhart (1260-1328), Thomas Aquinas

(1225-1274) and others. Their teachings caused a revolution within the Catholic Church and prepared the way for Reformers.

REFORMATION (15-17TH century) – Martin Luther (1483-1546), John Calvin (1509-1564), Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1532), and others rebelled against their Church; they judged the Roman Catholic Church as Superstitious and enslaving humanity in unacceptable doctrines. Catholic *defenders of the status quo*, in turn, judged the Reformation to be the spread of unbelief and rebellion of the human spirit against the divine will. They said that, the Reformation, if not checked, could be the end of Christianity in its orthodox form. Catholics saw themselves as true believers and saw Reformers as apostates and protestors (hence the name Protestants). The freedom to think (by Reformers), opened the way for Enlightenment.

ENLIGHTENMENT (Age of Reason) – The period 1650-1750 is regarded as a watershed that led to the season we are in today. It allowed HUMAN FREEDOM: the freedom to choose your OWN understanding of God or no God, to be theistic, atheistic, non-theistic, to be spiritual but not religious, the freedom to enquire and to question, the right to discover the truth for oneself, to choose one's own religion or no religion, the right to pursue happiness, the toleration of all views, and the equality of all people. They questioned the dogmatic superstructure of both Catholicism and Protestantism. Terms like *Theism*, *Atheism*, and *Pantheism* came with Enlightenment. They were never used in the Christian vocabulary before. It was John Toland (1670-1722) who discovered the word *Pantheism*, and became the first person to use it in his *Pantheisticon* of 1720. The Enlightenment's Age of Reason opened the door for *Critical Biblical Scholarship* of the next two hundred years. The total rejection of traditional religion has now become a distinctive feature of the post-Enlightenment period all over the world.

PIONEERS: Copernicus (1473-1543); Galileo (1564-1642); John Kepler (1571-1630); Rene' Descartes (1596-1650) Isaac Newton (1642-1727); Auguste Comte (1798-1857); Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872); Emile Durkheim (1858-1917); and many others.

EVANGELICALISM – Between the Enlightenment & the rise of Critical Biblical Scholarship of the 19th century, there arose in Europe a new movement called EVANGELICALS – This led to Evangelical missions into most the Americas and Africa. The concept of “*a born again Christian*” never appeared in Christian vocabulary before the 18th century. It’s surprising that most of the Evangelicals who engage me on Facebook don’t even know that Evangelical Theology is a relatively recent concept. Evangelicalism is a "Mafikizolo" Theology in Christianity. The "Rapture Theology", Dispensationalist beliefs, and much current eschatology came with the likes of John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) and friends. These do not appear in any Christian history vocabulary before 1800.

ALL the European Countries that birthed Evangelicalism have since rejected Evangelicalism and become agnostic or atheistic - and very wealthy. Africa has become Fundamentalist Evangelical and remains very poor. PIONEERS: *John Wesley* (1703-17910; *Charles Wesley* (1707-1788); *Jonathan Edwards* (1703-1758); *George Whitefield* (1714-1770); *Charles Finney* (1784-1872); *Charles Spurgeon* (1834-1892); *Smith Wigglesworth* (1859-1947); *Billy Sunday* (1862-1935), and others like *Nicholas Bhengu, Ngidi, Duma, Chiliza*, etc.

DARWINIAN EVOLUTION - Charles R Darwin (1809-1882) hit the final nail and destroyed all of the Bible's anthropological presuppositions. For Darwin, there was never a perfect creation; - Life, rather, evolved over billions of years from a single cell into self-conscious complexity. Without original perfection there could be no human fall into sin. If there was no human fall, there was no need for a divine rescue, as no one needs to be rescued from a fall that never happened or be restored to a status one has never possessed. This made the basis upon which we tell the story of salvation to be inoperative. All of medical science now assumes the truth of evolution. School textbooks from grade one across the whole world have incorporated the principles of Darwinian evolution into their textbooks. This means that we need to re-tell the story of Jesus in the light of the universal human experience, depth psychology, and the overall brokenness of the human condition. Jesus came to make us more human and to show us how to love, as we evolve out of our reptilian brain.

PENTECOSTALISM – Around 1904; A movement strong on God's immanence within a person's spirit (not strong on doctrines) but very open to the move of The Holy Spirit swept the Western world from the beginning of the 20th century. 80% of ALL Evangelicals are Pentecostals today.

DEPTH PSYCHOLOGY - The beginning of the 20th century saw a new revolution of the soul. The early pre-Reformation works of Soul scholars became realized. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and his disciple Karl Jung (1875-1961) offered the universe natural explanations for experiences that had traditionally been attributed to divine causes. What St. Paul referred to when He said, "*... I do not understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do what I want to do, but I do the very thing I hate*" (Romans 7:15), was now attributed to the power of our preconscious, subconscious, and unconscious mind (objective and subjective mind). The human psyche was found to be under the control of forces beyond the control of our conscious mind. Just like Copernicus destroyed the illusion of the earth's and of our place in the universe; and Sigmund Freud destroyed the illusion of "our perfect origins" and "the fall Theology", Depth Psychology dealt a blow to our greatest illusion - that of being a master of our thoughts and actions. Humanity is now entering a higher level of consciousness where through conscious meditation; we can use emotional intelligence, be aware, be conscious, and observe our thoughts, thus creating new actions. The findings of depth Psychology were a devastating attack on the credibility of traditional religious thinking. Many religious people were stunned to discover that 98% of all of our behavior is directed from the subconscious mind. God would then have to punish humanity eternally, for behavior that was far beyond their conscious mind.

POST SECOND WORLD WAR MOVEMENTS – Many Church based and other Civil / Spiritual movements mushroomed after the 2nd world war. Charismatic Ministries, Word of Faith Movements, Independent Ministries, Feminist, Liberation & Civil Rights Movements, Sexual Revolution of the 60s, and many New Thought/New Age Movements filled the void that was left by the war.

POSTMODERN SPIRITUALITY – 2000 years after the birth of Jesus, the universe is FINALLY entering the Golden Age that was announced by John the Baptist. However, many still DENY that humanity has entered a new religious era. In our Postmodern Spirituality, we now know that THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN is not something we get after death, but a condition of our hearts. We now play the role we once attributed to an external deity! OUR FUTURE IS TOTALLY POST-THEISTIC!

NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN!

- Today, some Evangelicals; - like Early Christians facing Romans; like the Catholics facing the Eastern Orthodox Church; like Reformers facing Catholics; some Evangelicals see themselves standing for the TRUE FAITH! – Their forerunners all said, “WE ARE THE TRUE BELIEVERS” - To be a TRUE BELIEVER automatically assumes others as nominal, fake, or misguided.
- Christianity came to birth proclaiming the end of the old age and the beginning of A NEW AGE. Two thousand years later, we are witnessing the rapid decline and death of traditional Christianity (which was born out of a belief in A NEW AGE), and we are observing the arrival of A NEW AGE; that is secular and post-Christian. Someone said that Christianity has been its own Grave-digger! - YET, this is also a paradox of Christianity; - IT IS ONLY OUT OF DEATH THAT NEW LIFE CAN COME!
- Like it was in the second century; Christians saw themselves leaving the superstitious and pagan beliefs of the Romans behind them; Romans in turn, saw Christians as atheists and Apostates. Catholics, Reformers, and later movements had the same stigma. Post-theistic Christians are today seen as atheists, heretics and apostates; - while we see ourselves leaving behind a traditional Christianity that is trapped in superstition and pagan beliefs. We are discovering God in the secular world. Like in the first century - "ATHEISTS" are leading the way into A NEW EARTH!!!

FREEDOM HAS FINALLY ARRIVED FOR HUMANITY!!!

As we move away from the traditional theology of *Divine Transcendence* to a Theology of *Divine Immanence*. Like the ancient Israelites; we are now FREED from the ENSLAVEMENT by the Church; Holy Books; Religion; Politics; Trade Unions; Institutions; and the powers of past traditions. We have reached a turning point! – Jesus came to END RELIGION; it just took another 2000 years of journeying to FINALLY END RELIGION! - JOHN THE BAPTIST ANNOUNCED A COMING NEW AGE FOR HUMANITY! - I WRITE AS A PROPHET OF THIS UNFOLDING AGE!

A NEW EXODUS IS ON:

Like the EXODUS narrative of ancient Israel being freed from Egyptian Slavery; A *NEW EXODUS* from Biblical Literalism, Superstition, Primitive Beliefs, Tribal Theologies, Separation Theologies, Ego Theologies, etc. Like in the first century; twenty first century Christians are leaving Paganism, Jewish Rituals, Primitive Beliefs, Greco-Roman Indoctrination and Superstition behind! - JOIN THE EXODUS!

Christ must be born again; He must be re-incarnated in a world that has become too different from the one in which He lived.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) - Jesuit Theologian

Postmodern Theology is liberating humanity from previous Theologies that depicted God as *an excessively temperamental deity, with a serious anger management problem*. It frees us from the illusory *Theology of a Punitive God*, who endlessly punished the children of Israel; who repented that He made humans and resolved to destroy them; who sent snakes to bite His people because they murmured against him; who decimated people because their King took a census of the Empire; who exacted the last drop of blood from "*His Son*", so that his just anger, evoked by sin, may be appeased. The God of dogma; - doctrines; incredible beliefs; Pre-Israelite Judaism rituals; Dualistic thinking, - and a God who entertains the very idea of having an enemy. Christianity as *A Religion of Power, Fear, and Control* is dying. Christianity will resurrect as a peace movement within Universal Spirituality! However good The Evangelical Theology was in its TIME; we cannot get over *The River Jordan* with it! It has now become a baggage that has to be left behind!

GOD IS DOING A NEW THING (Isaiah 43:19)! – The Divinization of the universe today, was long prophesied Jewish Prophets 2500 years ago!

I will put instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people ... and, they will not need to teach each other “know the Lord” – Everyone from the least to the greatest, will know me already.

Jeremiah 31:33

The age of imposed dogma has ended!!!

- Sons and daughters of god are here!
- The end of all belief systems is here!
- The new earth is here!- A new awakening is here! You know it!!!

Can you read our time?

“ ...you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times?” – Matthew 16:3

The Sons of Issachar are described in I Chronicles 12:32 as “men who understood the times and knew what Israel should do.”

If we are to arise and fulfill our destiny in the heart of God in this hour, the wisdom of the Sons of Issachar must characterize the our generation.

Namaste!!!

The highest authority lies inside of you!!!

Your body is the temple of the holy - which is you!!!

PART THREE

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES WE LIVE IN

WHERE DO WE COME FROM AND WHERE ARE WE GOING? Our current mental structure of consciousness emerged during the AXIAL AGE that historians say, began around 800 BC. This is the consciousness that makes us process information the way we process it. It was around the year 2800 BC that our Universe entered an age that Philosophers of Religion have named THE AXIAL AGE. This age lasted until 200 CE. Philosophers (Anaximander, Heraclitus, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, etc.), Prophets (Jeremiah, Isaiah, Zoroaster, etc), and Mystics (Buddha, Confucius, Lao Tzu, Jesus, St. Paul etc.) - were all born during this 1000-year period. This is the period that shaped the religious and philosophical course of world history. We are who we are today because of them. Philosophers, Scientists, and Visionaries, have since proposed theories of conscious evolution that further explain why our universe is currently the way it is; and how it is rapidly changing, and where conscious evolution is taking us. The universe is evolving because we are evolving. Our ultimate destination is what Pierre Teilhard de Chardin calls The Omega Point; the time and place when all sense of separation between God and man ceases. Humanity is getting infused with the Creator. We are becoming ONE with THE ABSOLUTE. (Henri Bergson; Rudolf Steiner; Sri Aurobindo; Jean Gebser, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin; Clare Graves, Don Beck, Alfred North Whitehead, Robert Brumet, Alan Cohen, Don Cupitt and Ken Wilber are some of the Philosophers & Visionaries – living and passed on – who are shaping our current evolutionary thinking).

THE EMERGING STRUCTURE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Human culture originated with a shared story and a shared mythology. We; all, - at one time or another; - belong to a culture whose mythology we share, until we later decide to separate ourselves from it. The culture and mythology of our group makes us who we are; tribal people. Evangelicals share the culture and mythology of Evangelicalism; so do Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses,

LDS, Moslems, Hindus, Catholics, Progressive Christians, etc. – they all share in the culture and mythology of their own movements. Professor Clare Graves developed the following model of human psychology that I want to share with you:

MEME – a meme is a cultural equivalent of a gene that can self-replicate and evolve through environmental pressure. Memes pattern the way we think, feel and act. Value memes are systems of core values that shape human choices and perspectives. The word – meme – was first introduced by British scientist, Prof. Richard Dawkins, to discuss evolutionary principle in explaining the spread of ideas and cultural phenomena.

1. **BEIGE MEME:** – this is an instinctive/survivalist meme that emerged 100,000 years ago. It is no longer active in most of humanity.
2. **PURPLE MEME:** – this meme began 50,000 years ago. It focuses on safety through appeasing the gods. This is the meme that gave birth to Ancestral veneration/worship, shamans, animism, and tribal leaders. This meme is still very much active in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.
3. **RED MEME:** – this is the impulsive and egocentric meme. It erupts with vengeance; warlords, conquerors, feudal empires, and power gods. This meme emerged 10,000 years ago. It is often exemplified through warfare, terrorism, and genocide.
4. **BLUE MEME:** - this is the meme that informs us that life has meaning, direction, and purpose. It emerged 5,000 years ago (around the time of Abraham, Krishna, and Horus). This is the meme that controls most of Fundamentalists. Songs like “Onward Christian soldiers” reflect this meme. Most of humanity still hangs around this meme. It is an ego and tribal meme. This is the meme that sees our group as chosen for God and others damned for Hell.
5. **ORANGE MEME:** - This is an achiever’s strategic meme that emerged 400 years ago. This meme gave us science, capitalism, democracy, objective enquiry, freethinking, self-reliance, creativity, prosperity, risk taking, liberty, pursuit of happiness and Industrial revolution. It is not the most common meme, but it is the most

powerful meme in the universe. This meme values scientific evidence greatly. Only about 30% of the world's population have this meme.

6. **GREEN MEME:** - This is the egalitarian and communitarian meme. It seeks peace with the inner self and explores, with others, the caring dimensions of the community. It is a response to the Fundamentalism and Dogmatism that is found in the blue meme. The GREEN MEME is a great threat to the little juvenile God of the BLUE MEME. This meme values the integration of leading edge science and leading edge spirituality. The GREEN MEME birthed child welfare, civil rights, feminism, gay rights, human rights, free thought, own enquiry, Environmental care, Social Networks (Facebook, Twitter, My Space, Linkden, Skype, etc.).

CHRISTIAN HISTORY AND THE MEMES

A Spiritual movement that, at one point in its life cycle, is a vehicle for evolution, can, at another stage in its life cycle, be a retardant of evolution.

Robert Brumet

Christianity is a product of Judaism (a red/blue meme), which itself is a product of Greek and Roman Civilizations (orange meme). If the Jewish nation never got exiled in Babylon, Syria, Persia, Greece, and Rome, there would be no Bible, no Synagogues (and their replicas, Churches), and not Greco-Roman Church history as we know it. If there were no Jewish Captivity, Jesus would not have died on the cross. If there were no Emperor Constantine (who saw a vision of the cross), we would not be using crosses. Everything is very much super-interconnected in our universe. There is a cause for every effect! We talk of Dark Ages and Middle ages, simply because of Greco-Roman Civilization that happened Before Christ (BC). After the Dark Ages / Middle Ages period that lasted 1000 years, we had a Catholic Renaissance in the 15th century. Mystics like Martin Luther were born during this Renaissance. The Renaissance gave birth to a meme that gave us The Protestant Church in the 16th century. The Enlightenment period (orange meme) was a meme born out of the free thinking mode brought about by the Protestant Movement.

The Evangelical Movement was just an offshoot of The Protestant Movement in the 18th century, and a reaction to the Enlightenment Movement of the 17th century. The Protestant Movement has since sub-divided itself into more than 50,000 groups and sub-groups. BEHOLD I AM DOING A NEW THING (Isaiah 43:19) Christianity is currently evolving out of the BLUE MEME (a beliefs based religion) into a GREEN MEME (a Spirituality Movement). The Bible, when studied in its progression from The Old Testament (red and blue meme) to The New Testament (blue/orange meme). The Bible is thus, humankind's journey from sub-consciousness to consciousness to super-consciousness (Christ-consciousness). The Bible has a lot to teach us about the evolution of God in human consciousness.

The Catholic Movement and Protestant Movement have now given birth to A GREEN MEME. We are now entering a new dimension of life. We are birthing A NEW REALITY! – This NEW REALITY is much bigger than our old ideas of GOD. It is much bigger than all the boxes where, out of our meme conditioning, we used to box God. Conscious evolution requires us to let go of our existing world in order to birth a new world. Let go of a mythical and a primitive BLUE MEME and come inside a GREEN MEME. This is the meme that includes instead of excluding. Jesus was an inclusive conscious evolutionary. Jesus was a FIRST BORN in a new race being birthed here on earth. There is A GREAT AWAKENING in all parts of the world. It is a race patterned after Jesus of Nazareth. This is the germinating seed of the new race that was sowed by Jesus 2000 years ago.

JESUS FOR THE NON-RELIGIOUS!

A few years ago, I had a very concerned Evangelical Pastor and friend; -- He was genuinely concerned on the atheistic direction my Spirituality was taking; So, I gave him Bishop Spong's book, JESUS FOR THE NON-RELIGIOUS, so that He can acquaint himself with my spiritual direction in a more informed way. He then wrote me an email & said, "*I don't agree with the Theology in which Spong interprets Jesus*". I thought to myself; ---"Didn't He read the title of the book?"

The JESUS EXPLOSION that is currently emerging is atheistic! - I've often said to Fundamentalists; -- "Have you ever thought that ATHEISM could be God's answer to your existential angst?" --- *Maybe God intended us to embrace ATHEISM before NEW WINE can be poured inside NEW WINESKINS!*

Ladies & Gentleman: There is A NEW AWAKENING happening; A JESUS EXPLOSION that will shift and destroy any old idea you had about the Jesus of your childhood. This AWAKENING is still in its infancy stage, but is steadily gaining momentum. To many; it looks like PURE ATHEISM, but as you get close and deeper you discover LOVE like you've never know LOVE before.

A NEW JESUS EXPLOSION IS BREAKING FORTH IN HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS!

- Jesus free of Dogma
- Jesus free of Religion
- Jesus free of Myth

2600 years ago a man called Sirddartha Gautama, was born to a Royal Hindu family. He later left the religion of the book (Hinduism) after his Enlightenment, and became The Buddha. Prophet Jeremiah was Buddha's contemporary during the axial age. The axial age was humanity's greatest AGE OF AWAKENING! --- Confucius, Lao Tzu, Zoroaster, Plato, and other Greek Philosophers also rose in this great period in human history. Jesus was born at the end of the axial age.

THE SECOND AXIAL AGE IS HERE!

Jeremiah spoke of a time where human beings will live from the heart, as opposed to Holy Books (Jer. 31:33). The Buddha did this for Buddhism. Jesus came to do it for Christianity; unfortunately Christianity got hijacked by Emperor Constantine in 312 & made a Religion of The Roman Empire. The JESUS EXPLOSION is correcting this!

WE NEED JESUS!

The religion called Christianity is dying; the casualty of an expanded worldview. The God experience in Jesus - that experience upon which Christianity is built - is newly dawning and will in time create new forms through which the new vision can

live. Once Jesus is freed from the prison of religion, a renaissance and a reformation are possible. Jesus for the non-religious comes into view. I anticipate and await Jesus' new explosion into the human consciousness. A Jesus stripped of the myths we've grown up with. We need a Jesus who is more approachable and more believable, as the key to a new life and a new humanity.

Bishop John Shelby Spong - Jesus for The Non-Religious

Christ must be born again; He must be re-incarnated in a world that has become different from the one in which He lived!

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) - Jesuit Theologian

OUR COLLECTIVE MESSIAH IS HERE!

Many of the World Religions have prophecies that await the return or the arrival of a Messiah, an Avatar, or a Prophet, who will deliver humanity and the World to its ultimate destiny: Heaven on Earth. --- Perhaps the grand narrative of Modern Spirituality could be that, together, WE, as a collective, through the combined energy of our good hearts and mindful compassion, constitute THE NEW MESSIAH.

Dr. William Bloom

The next Buddha will not take the form of an individual; The next Buddha will take the form of a Community; A Community practicing understanding and loving kindness; A Community practicing mindful living; This may be the most important thing WE can do for the survival of THE EARTH!

Thich Nhat Hahn

Facebook, Twitter, and other Social Networks (China has two networks that reach almost a billion people) are the event that ushers in THE COSMIC MESSIAH. As Prophets of old said, "ALL eyes shall see Him".

Your religion can be an open gateway to a deeper Spirituality; your religion can also be a closed gate that stops you from evolving into a deeper Spirituality; It just depends on how YOU use it.

Eckhart Tolle

GOD WITHOUT GOD

The Christian faith stands accused of arrogance, hypocrisy, abuse of power, imperialism, dictatorship and genocide, discredited variously by science, rationalism, pluralism, Vatican politics and protestant fundamentalism, and finally rendered obsolete by democracy, wealth, technology, and even the church's own liberal wing.

God without God has no argument with science or atheism or pluralism – indeed it takes these as its premises, then, sets out to explore what remains of the western spiritual tradition. We move beyond theism and atheism to consider the mystery of existence itself, discovering a tradition full of contemporary resonance, with a profound and timeless integrity for body, mind and spirit. The atheist case is sound, but is not the last word. The atheist argues that there is nothing in the observable universe that requires, or even suggests, the existence of God. It refuses to acknowledge a God who is all-powerful, yet allows unjust suffering, or who presumes to demand obedience on threat of punishment; even if such a God does exist, it has no right to our pathetic acquiescence.

The potential theist must come to terms with the truth of the atheist analysis. The wonders of the universe have all been explained, dependent on nothing but the big bang and a few simple constants; there is no omnipotent God intervening to prevent human suffering or avenge every human injustice, at least not in terms that we demand. The atheist case is made against a very particular image of God, the God of presumptive monotheism, a God promoted by western kings and emperors in their own over-glorified self image: autonomous, all-powerful, autocratic, wrathful, vengeful and demanding, with moments of random benevolence supposedly justifying the rest.

Religion may have been used to justify wars, manipulate individuals, and crush the human spirit, but there remains a profound unity embracing the whole of humankind when the individual stands with open honesty before the mysteries of life and eternity. God without God sets to explore what happens to the western spiritual tradition when the God of presumptive monotheism – the wrathful king – is removed. Far from being

destroyed or diminished, it flourishes in its liberation. It emerges from its captivity as an egalitarian, humanistic spirituality that challenges and defies all earthly powers in its celebration of the realm of the spirit, the real motive of the divine.

The Church still claims two proofs of the existence of God, and they are entirely compatible with the atheist case against the God of presumptive monotheism. The first is the argument from creation: not that anything in the universe needs God in order to operate, but that anything exists at all, that there is even space and the potential for anything to exist at all. The second begins with the experience of being self-consciously alive: the sense of being a conscious observer of, and decision-making participant in, the one particular life that we call our own. As fragile and insignificant as it may seem against the vastness of the universe, the mystery of self-consciousness is the most significant experience in each of our lives, indeed the carrier of all our experience and the very essence of life. It points once again towards the mystery of existence itself. It is to this ultimate mystery that the church assigns first the name Existence or Being, 'which alone is without origin or end,' and then the name God.

In acknowledging God who is the ground of all being, we find ourselves in profound communion with the whole human race, for there is only one human kind, only one creation, and only one ground of all being. The Hindu faith recognises Brahman, the limitless one, ultimate being, beyond all the icons and incarnations. The Buddhist kneels in silence seeking to disconnect from the pain of this world and to connect instead with an essence or non-essence far more profound that lies beyond. The Sikh reaches out for the one God of all human kind, known in all authentic faiths, in meditation, worship and self-service. The Buddhist seeks Buddha nature within each human soul, the Hindu faith speaks of atman, the presence of God in each individual, and our own tradition sees the image of God as the very essence of human kind. All who seek to understand what it means to be human in the world, and who seek the potential for good in every human being, are reaching out for the same mystery. This includes those who assume the titles atheist or secular humanist to indicate their entirely proper rejection of many arbitrary and ultimately trivial images of God.

Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), a key philosopher and theologian of the western tradition, has a profound respect for the mystery that is God. He asserts that God cannot be compared to any other thing, or placed in any category. To categorise is to define and limit according to concepts derived from the observable universe, and the mystery that is God lies beyond all these. It is limiting even to place God in the category of things that exist: if that category were to be defined in some way, and all the members of that category counted, giving a total of n , God is not the $(n+1)$ th item in the category. In the same way God does not fit the category of beings, even the supposed category of spiritual beings; much less the categories of persons, kings, authorities, benefactors, or males. God is beyond all such earthly or human concepts, and yet, as the ground of all being, contains all the excellence, all the goodness, all the richness, of all these categories, and infinitely more besides. It follows that when we speak of God in metaphor, as king or lord or protector, or describe God in earthly attributes like powerful or merciful, we are always on the brink of diminishing God. And the moment we confuse the metaphor with the reality, we have created an idol, a false god in the image of created things.

We are called to recognise and acknowledge the image of God in all human kind – an original, fundamental godliness – no matter how much it has been marred, neglected, damaged or obscured by the years. We are also alerted to the intriguing possibility that a perfect human being would be a perfect image of God, both fully human and fully divine. The imagined being – both fully human and fully divine – is our definition of Christ of faith. It is not unreasonable to choose to affirm that the historic Jesus of Nazareth is one with the Christ of faith. It all depends on our image of Yahweh Elohim as a distant presumptuous Superior Being for whom appearance in human form would be a scandalous anomaly: rather we have understood Yahweh Elohim as close to creation, embracing and upholding it all, containing all the excellence of everything that exists. We see this divinity breaking through in every beautiful and wholesome aspect of creation, in every human individual, and in every act of compassion.

We can all acknowledge individuals who have shown in their lives the best of what it is to be human, and who have therefore shown glimpses of the divine, whether a parent, a friend, a teacher, a Ghandi, or a Mandela. The first invitation is to rank our inspirations, placing Jesus of Nazareth in first rank. The second is to name that individual, not only our inspiration and example, but our chosen ideal, our leader and guide, and even our God. These were the choices of the first disciples and the early Christian communities. They are the choices of the Christian community today. Choosing to believe that a particular individual in history is one with the Christ of faith adds significantly to our model or metaphor for Yahweh Elohim. It affirms with absolute clarity that our divinely valued humanity includes not just our thought life, but our physical life as well.

We use the much-abused word God as little as possible, only with caution, always pausing to reflect: it means existence, being, ultimate reality and mystery, and infinite compassion; it means Jesus of Nazareth, and the sum of all ideals, and the essence of life itself. It must never mean any of those presumptions that the atheist rightly ejects. We might ask again in what sense this God exists, beyond our model and metaphor, beyond theism and atheism. Certainly there is compassion, identifiable and existing, in the world, perhaps even in every human heart, variously as reality, longing and goal. If nothing else, we can assert that the sum total of this identifiable compassion does exist, and we can name that sum total as our existent God. Even if no compassion remained in the world we could name the concept and the potential as our God, and it would exist as concept and potential. More fundamentally, if anything exists at all. Yahweh exists by definition as the ground of all being; and if anything is considered wonderful and good, or colloquially 'divine', then, Elohim exists by definition as the sum of all divinity.

There is nothing to fear in the possibility that there is no God beyond the skies, that life ends at death, that this life is all there is, with no meaning beyond itself; that the future is non-existence, without retribution, reward or recompense. In the contemplation of this final rest we may even find contentment and peace. The greater fear is that our metaphor is too weak: that there is, after all, an arbitrary God of wrath and condemnation; but if there is such a God,

we are lost already, condemned either to his wrath or to a desperate, pathetic servitude. If God is not a God of love, there is no hope, and no point in believing.

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GOD AND MODERN ATHEISM

If the idea of God is to hold meaning in light of the historical Jesus, then "God" has to change. God, like Jesus, needs a demotion. The idea of God in traditional Christianity is a complex yet simple notion. This paradox has always marked Christian theology. The contradiction arises because Christianity is a combination of biblical stories and Greek philosophy.

In the Bible, God is often like a person who, though big and powerful, is spoiled. God has immature emotions, feeds on prejudice, demands immoral acts, puts up an amazing and dangerous fuss when ignored, threatens those of different opinion or nations of a different God, and generally delights in recognition and praise. It is hard not to see the biblical God as a complex of emotions not often guided by compassion.

Yet, the biblical God is also filled with compassion, abounds in forgiveness, has a non-negotiable standard of justice particularly to the advantage of the poor, and is the foundation of moral order. God in the bible is complex because somehow, if the picture is to be coherent, the drastic emotional swings must be reconciled within the identity of God as the voice of justice and compassion. Sometimes this reconciliation is impossible. A being who stands outside history as the creator of the world simply should not be so petty as to express jealousy. Yet, the biblical God does exactly this.

GOD IN CLASSICAL PHILOSOPHY

In the Greek philosophical world, which is also the heritage of Christianity, the idea of God is based not on the Bible but on the concept of absolute simplicity. By definition, God is not a person, that is, and individual, and does not have emotions. The distinction is drawn between existing things, like people, or existing qualities, like anger or peacefulness, and God, who is the principle of things. In classical philosophy, God does not exist, but is existence. God does not have emotions but is the foundation of being. God is not in history - because God cannot be a "something" among other things - but is the whole of the historical order of things. Neither can God

have a past or a future, because God is not in time, like 'things' are in time, but rather is ALL TIME (or time-less).

In classical philosophy, which defined Christianity from the time of Justin Martyr (approximately 250 CE), to the Protestant Reformation (approximately 1525 CE), God is virtually NOTHING, but is nothing in a very special sense. This sense is that God cannot be a SOMETHING, since this would turn God into history and make God part of time. God is beyond time and history, which means that what happens in the world and how things happen are not specifically intended by God.

When properly understood, the classical notion of God in philosophy is not that far away from modern atheism. To say that God is absolute simplicity is the same as saying that God cannot be thought (since God is the foundation of thinking but not the object of thinking). But to say that God cannot be thought is basically the same as saying God's existence cannot be thought. This is close to modern atheism, since the conclusion of both the classical idea of God as absolute simplicity and the modern atheistic denial of God's existence agree that God does not exist. Atheism tries to prove that God does not exist by demonstrating that there is no evidence for God as an existing thing. Modern atheism is thus a rejection of Post-Reformation notions of God.

The classical theistic position is actually more sophisticated because it concludes that, as absolute simplicity, God is beyond the question of existence and non-existence, and, even further, is misunderstood as an existing thing. To speak about God today inevitably turns God into "a thing" that one either believes or rejects. God is no longer about the very mystery and absolute beauty of life, and no longer functions to take us beyond literalism into parable.

MOVING BEYOND THE SKY GOD

With Nietzsche in mind, it seems best to declare that the word God is dead. We can never mean it in the same way ancient people did because we are not ancient people. And we can spend a lot of time with God without really saying anything significant about life. We need to create a whole new language

in the place of the language of God. This is a genuine challenge in theology with the historical Jesus. The historical Jesus lived when the world was thought to be a three-storied universe. It was not difficult in his world to think that "up there" in the heavens was divine, that down here on earth dwelt fragile human beings, and that below us dwells the dead and demons.

Contemporary religious literalism - which constantly turns God into an individual who lives somewhere in the sky; - is only one problem with the idea of God. We need to understand the classical notion of God as absolute simplicity and combine this with the post-Reformation notion of God as a literal person. So, mystery becomes the classical sense of God as ineffable reality, and we can say this reality is still "personal" because it is what we live in. Don Cupitt has advocated for the transformation of religious language from God to LIFE:

LIFE is that in which 'we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28)

If Christianity is no longer conceived on the footing of the Trinity, where the problem is to work out the identity of Jesus, but shifts from the thinking about the historical Jesus as one who worked out the Christ-nature of himself, then indeed a historical Jesus community is still a Christian community. It is Christian in that it seeks the critical engagement of the self and reality with a parabolic vision of a differently reasoned world. It is possible, that is, to live differently, and this is the challenge of THE CHRIST YOU ARE!

(An excerpt from Dr. David Galston's book: *EMBRACING THE HUMAN JESUS*. Dr. Galston is a brilliant Jesus Seminar Scholar based in Ontario, Canada. He leads The Quest Learning Centre, which is a fellowship committed to following the practices and teachings of the historical Jesus)

THE 25 CORE MESSAGES OF CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD

1. **God talks to everyone, all the time.** The question is not, to whom does God talk? The question is: Who listens?
2. **We are all one.** All things are One Thing. There is only One Thing, and all things are part of the One Thing There Is.
3. **There's enough.** It is not necessary to compete for, much less fight over, the "stuff of which there is enough." Simply learn to share it.
4. **There's nothing you have to do.** There is much you *will* do, but nothing that you are *required* to do. This is because God wants nothing and needs nothing.
5. **There are Three Basic Principles of Life:** *Functionality, Adaptability, and Sustainability.*
6. **There is no such thing as Right and Wrong,** there is only What Works and What Does Not Work, given what it is that you are trying to do. What it is that you are trying to do, and what you *will* do, shall determine who you are and how you evolve as a species.
7. **Every act is an act of self-definition.**
8. **Love is all there is.**
9. **You are the creator of your own reality.**
10. **The Three Tools of Creation are:** *Thought, Word, and Action.*
11. **Your life has nothing to do with you.** It is about everyone whose life you touch, and how you touch it.
12. **You are not your body, you are not your mind, and you are not your soul.** You are the unique combination of all three, which comprises **The Totality Of You.** You are an individuation and an aspect of Divinity; an expression of God on earth.
13. **The purpose of your life is to recreate yourself anew in the next grandest version of the greatest vision ever you held about Who You Are.**
14. **There is no such thing as Time and Space, there is only Here and Now.**
15. **There is no such place as hell,** and eternal damnation does not exist.
16. **Death does not exist.** What you call "death" is simply a process of Re-Identification, and no one concludes their present experience of physical life at a time or in a way that is not of their choosing.

17. **There are no victims and no villains.** The moment you declare anything, everything unlike it will come into the space, not because you are a victim, but because of The Law of Opposites, which produces a Contextual Field within which what you wish to express may be experienced.

18. **There is no such thing as Absolute Truth.** All truth is subjective. Within this framework there are five levels of truth telling: *Tell your truth to yourself about yourself; Tell your truth to yourself about another; Tell your truth about yourself to another; Tell your truth about another to another; Tell your truth to everyone about everything.*

19. **The human race has created a precise set of illusions.** The Ten Illusions of Humans are: *Need Exists, Failure Exists, Disunity Exists, Insufficiency Exists, Requirement Exists, Judgment Exists, Condemnation Exists, Conditionality Exists, Superiority Exists, Ignorance Exists.* These illusions serve humanity when it knows how to use them.

20. **The Three Core Concepts of Holistic Living** are *Honesty, Awareness, and Responsibility.* Live according to these precepts and self-anger will disappear from your life.

21. **Life functions within a Be-Do-Have paradigm.** Most people have this backward, imagining that first one must “have” things in order to “do” things, thus to “be” what they wish to be. Reversing this process is the fastest way to experience mastery in living.

22. **There are Three Levels of Awareness:** *Hope, Faith, and Knowing.* Spiritual mastery is about living from the third level.

23. **There are Five Fallacies about God that create crisis, violence, killing and war.**

- *First*, the idea that God *needs* something.
- *Second*, the idea that God *can fail to get* what He needs.
- *Third*, the idea that God *has separated* you from Him because you have not given Him what He needs.
- *Fourth*, the idea that God still needs what He needs so badly that God now *requires* you, *from your separated position*, to give it to Him.
- *Fifth*, the idea that God *will destroy you* if you do not meet His requirements.

24. There are also Five Fallacies About Life that likewise produce crisis, violence, killing and war.

- *First*, the idea that human beings are *separate* from each other.
- *Second*, the idea that there is *not enough* of what human beings need to be happy.
- *Third*, the idea that in order to *get* the stuff of which there is *not enough*, human beings must *compete* with each other.
- *Fourth*, the idea that *some* human beings are *better* than *other* human beings.
- *Fifth*, the idea that it is *appropriate* for human beings to *resolve severe differences* created by all the other fallacies by *killing each other*.

25. Your experience of yourself and your world will change overnight if you adopt, collectively, the Five Steps to Peace:

- Permit yourself to acknowledge that some of your old beliefs about God and about Life are no longer working.
- Explore the possibility that there is something you do not fully understand about God and about Life, the understanding of which would change everything.
- Announce that you are willing for new understandings of God and Life to now be brought forth, understandings that could produce a new way of life on this planet.
- Courageously examine these new understandings and, if they align with your personal inner truth and knowing, enlarge your belief system to include them.
- Express your life as a demonstration of your highest beliefs, rather than as a denial of them.

Neale Donald Walsch is an American author of the series *Conversations with God*. The nine books in the complete series are *Conversations With God* (books 1–3), *Friendship with God*, *Communion with God*, *The New Revelations*, *Conversations with God for Teens*, *Tomorrow's God*, and *Home with God: In a Life That Never Ends*. He is also an actor, screenwriter, and speaker.

A NEW CHRISTIANITY FOR A NEW MILLENIUM

Christianity is a faith system whose scriptures are the product of the first century, which inevitably means that those scriptures reflect the world-view of first century men and women. These scriptures assume that epilepsy, mental illness and muteness result from demon possession. They assume that sickness is a manifestation of divine punishment. They assume that God is a supernatural being, who lives somewhere external to the planet earth and that this God invades human history periodically in supernatural, miraculous ways to accomplish the divine purpose. These scriptures also assume that whatever could not be explained within the first century frame of reference must be regarded as a miracle. This of course means that people today, who want to literalize the scriptures as the 'inerrant' words of God, inevitably literalize a world-view and a series of assumptions that no modern, educated person could possibly believe.

The creeds of Christianity are products of the 4th century and refer to a 4th century view of the world. One clear creedal assumption is that the earth is the centre of a three-tiered universe, with hell being beneath the earth and heaven being above the sky. They reveal a picture of a divine escalator moving up and down amid the three tiers. The creeds also assume the literal and biological accuracy of what came to be called the Virgin Birth in which Jesus is conceived by the operation of the Holy Spirit. This idea is of special interest because one of the earliest forms of the Christian creed came to be called "*The Apostles' Creed*" suggesting that it in fact reflects the beliefs of the apostles themselves. The fact is that neither Paul, the first writer of the New Testament (51-64 CE), nor Mark, the author of the first of the gospels to be written (ca.72 CE) *ever mentions* the Virgin Birth of Jesus.

Paul says simply that Jesus was "born of a woman," like every other human being and "born under the law," like every other Jew. Mark portrays Jesus as a perfectly normal adult human being, who comes to be baptized in the River Jordan by John the Baptist at which time the Holy Spirit falls on him and he becomes a "God-infused human life." The first narrative of a miraculous or

Virgin Birth for Jesus does not enter the Christian tradition until the 9th decade of the Common Era in the writings of Matthew, who wrote long after most, if not all, of the apostles had died. A second and very contradictory version of the story of Jesus' virgin birth; is then added to the developing tradition by Luke, about a decade after Matthew.

The virgin birth story assumes that the woman is not a genetic contributor to any new life, for the idea that a woman had an egg cell was not discovered until the early years of the 18th century! Clearly the belief system of the apostles did not include the concepts found in the "Apostles' Creed." So, if the creeds are literalized along with the doctrines and dogmas of the Christian Church, which are based on those creeds, what happens is that the three-tiered universe and long-abandoned biological assumptions are also literalized thus making the creeds nonsensical in the modern world.

Most of the liturgical forms still used to some degree in all Christian churches are the product of the 13th century. This means that we are still forced to make 13th century assumptions if we want to continue to worship God in the 21st century. The all-seeing God who plays the role of a judge is certainly apparent when we pray, *"Almighty God unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known and from whom no secrets are hid."* Not surprisingly it seems appropriate to say *"Lord, have mercy, Lord, have mercy"* to this 13th century view of God. Salvation is assumed to be a gift from this God above the sky, who comes to rescue us from the fall from our original perfection and who pays the price of our sins in the death of Jesus. That is the context in which we say, *"Jesus died for my sins!"*

In our post-Darwinian world, however, there is no original perfection. There is, rather, an ongoing and ever-evolving process carried out over billions of years from single cell life to the complex self-conscious creatures that we are today. If there was no original perfection, there could never have been a fall from perfection, so *"original sin"* is also nonsensical. If there was no fall into *"original sin"* then the idea of a divine rescue from a fall that never happened loses all of its meaning. Is there any reason not to understand why 21st century people find the liturgies of our Church to be so

meaningless? *21st century Christianity is thus wedded to the world-view of its 1st century scriptures, its 4th century creeds and its 13th century liturgies.* Consequently Christianity presents itself to potential modern believers encased in a series of doctrinal and liturgical forms, undergirded by a theological point of view that communicates almost nothing to those people who gather in church to worship.

Why is there any surprise that the number of worshipers is in steep decline? Modern Christianity offers only two alternatives. The first is to close our minds to the explosion of knowledge in order to build a protective fortress around the religious formulas of antiquity. We then surround these formulas with the claim that they are supported by an infallible or inerrant tradition. Such a stand offers people the security of the delusion that they possess the ultimate truth of God. *We call these who think this way “fundamentalists” and they come in both a Catholic and Protestant variety.* So from this perspective the church’s invitation is to “believe this or leave.”

Those who elect this second option today are legion! People are abandoning “institutional religion” in droves. The Church Alumni Association is now the fastest growing organization in the Christian West. *As religious conviction fades secular humanism becomes the only viable alternative.* The tension between a religion tied to antiquity and secular values quite divorced from that religious heritage today marks not only church life, but our national political life. We seem to be gridlocked between both a religious and political past that some want to impose on all and a religion-less future the nature of which no one finally understands.

THE SCOURGE OF BIBLICAL LITERALISM!

By literalizing the Bible, religious people have also unknowingly literalized the world-view of the first century that assumed that anything that could not be understood by first century minds must be a miracle, explained only by an appeal to the presence of a supernatural power. So the presumably “inerrant” Bible of Protestant fundamentalism and the presumably “infallible” theological doctrines of Roman Catholicism, become nonsensical in the 21st century.

A Christianity based on those outdated ideas can never be compelling to 21st century people unless they are willing and able to close their minds to modern knowledge. *Biblical inerrancy is therefore not just ignorance, it is a distortion of both truth and humanity.* To quote the Bible to oppose equality for women or justice and dignity for homosexual people is to confuse the cultural fears of yesterday with ultimate truth. It is also to be pathetically and profoundly uninformed.

To insist that creeds are unchanging truth or to make creedal faith the hallmark of Orthodoxy is to state something that is absurd. It is to pretend that a quite limited fourth century, Greek-oriented world-view is the same as “the mind of God.” So, when we learn that there is no all-seeing God, who lives above the sky of a three-tiered universe, who is always looking down to record our deeds in the record book of life, by which our eternal destiny will be determined, is not to say that there is no God, but it is to say that truth is always relative. Heaven as a place of reward and hell as a place of punishment have become nonsensical dated ideas.

If the story of Jesus’ ascension literally means that he went up into the sky then we need to embrace the modern reality that Jesus did not get to heaven, he got into orbit or else he escaped the force of gravity and wandered into the infinity of space. Yet, on the basis of those limited, time bound fourth century creeds religious wars have been fought, religious persecution has been carried out, “heretics” have been burned at the stake and “witches” have been hanged to keep alive the myth that human words can capture, in some unchanging form, eternal truth. *So often the business of religion has ceased to be the search for truth and has become the activity of mind control.*

Christians who claim inerrancy for the first century words of the gospels or infallibility for their doctrinal understanding of the fourth century words of the creeds are quite simply delusional people, and in the name of both God and truth, they need to be resisted mightily. Yet the facts of history reveal that Galileo was condemned by the church for suggesting that first century cosmology was inaccurate and Darwin is still being roundly criticized and politically resisted for suggesting that pre-modern biology is simply incorrect.

Let there be no mistake; I am convinced that there is a reality to the experience of God, but I do not interpret this reality as if God is a supernatural being who does miracles. I rather see this reality as a transcendent presence that is beyond human boundaries and that calls me and compels me not to allow those boundaries to bind my humanity into less than it is capable of being. I view God as the Source of life and love, and as the Ground of Being calling me to live, to love and to be.

My Christian life is thus a journey for which there is no literal roadmap. I am convinced that if I walk this journey deeply enough and faithfully enough, *I will be led beyond all religious forms – beyond scripture, creeds, doctrine and dogma and into the wordless wonder of the true meaning of worship.* The Christian Church exists, I believe, to point all of us beyond the boundaries of our own humanity. It is a pity that institutional religion in all its forms does not understand its own message!

This article is by my Spiritual and Intellectual Mentor: Bishop John Shelby Spong, whose books have sold more than a million copies, was bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Newark for 24 years before his retirement in 2001. His admirers acclaim him as a teaching bishop who makes contemporary theology accessible to the ordinary layperson — he's considered the champion of an inclusive faith by many, both inside and outside the Christian church. In one of his recent books, *The Sins of Scripture: Exposing the Bible's Texts of Hate to Discover the God of Love* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2005), this visionary thinker seeks to introduce readers to a proper way to engage the holy book of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

A CRITIQUE OF DR. RAVI ZACHARIAS' BOOK WHY JESUS?

Professor Marcus Borg has defined our generation as "A Christ-haunted and Christ forgetting generation". This is an apt description of the thought life of world renowned Evangelical Apologist and author, Dr. Ravi Zacharias. He seems to be haunted by The New Spirituality Jesus while forgetting the very Biblical Jesus He tries so hard to promote. I'm here reviewing his book, WHY JESUS?; where He tackles a subject that is very mysterious and difficult (though some belief systems say it's easy). Ravi Zacharias has dedicated close to 40 years of his life writing, lecturing, and debating about his belief that the Christian faith is true, and can provide all the answers you seek. The word "apologist" has nothing to do with being sorry. In fact, it has everything to do with thinking one is *right*. Originating from the Greek word *apologizesthai*, meaning to "give an account" it refers to "a person who offers an argument in defense of something controversial, typically a theory or religious doctrine." With this in mind, Dr Zacharias can never be wrong, as long as He calls himself an apologist. Actually, the New Spirituality has to be wrong, in order for Dr. Zacharias' apologetics to be right.

It is important to start by saying, *Why Jesus?* is primarily a critique of The New Spirituality. One of its chapters is entitled "From Oprah to Chopra"; and the Hindu and Buddhist traditions from which they originate. Although the book is titled *Why Jesus?*, the contents of the book more accurately satisfy the question *Why not the New Spirituality?* This is a question that millions of postmodern followers of The New Spirituality will ask. Which Spirituality is credible and relevant to them? Science based Spirituality or Dr. Zacharias's primitive Spirituality of a world that no longer exist? This is an important distinction. *Why Jesus?* is not a book that gives a positive apologetic for Jesus. *Why Jesus?* Is not a book about the historical Biblical Jesus. *Why Jesus?* Turns its polemical eye toward tearing down the constructs of what Zacharias terms "Western Spiritualism." *Why Jesus* is a book about The Evangelical mind; that of an anti-science, and anti-free thinking Jesus. The Evangelical mind is conditioned by a very narrow minded Theology. Most mainline

Scholars find the contents of *Why Jesus* leaving much to be desired and not even worth a scholarly critique.

Zacharias takes on the New Spiritualists and the "Eastern traditions" on which they are based and offers up his Evangelical version of "the Gospel of Christ" as a firm foundation in its stead. In his book, Zacharias directly challenges the works of very influential and famous Spiritual writers such as Elizabeth Lesser, Eckhart Tolle, Neale Donald Walsch, Deepak Chopra, James Redfield, Rhonda Byrne, Dan Brown, Wayne Dyer, Deepak Chopra, the Dali Lama, and Marianne Williamson. He gives special attention to the influence of Oprah Winfrey's media platform in reshaping society by introducing and promoting certain books and authors. He then goes on to discuss major New Thought and New Spirituality tenets like:

- Jesus was only a good teacher;
- Reincarnation is real; truth is relative;
- There is no sin; and perfection is possible.
- Christianity is but one among many ways to eternal life;
- The belief that we are all gods and have to discover our own divinity;
- Recent history shows that media is now the main influence on our thought.
- Truth is relevant in so many other life situations, why not in religious thought?
- New Spirituality has displaced inductive reasoning with "a personalized mystical revelation as the sufficient if not sole basis for universal truth."

Citing many examples from Scripture, Zacharias points to "the biblical Jesus" as the clear truth against the distorted image portrayed by the New Spirituality. He reminds readers that spirituality is not a game. While seeking "spiritual fulfillment," the world increasingly pursues Eastern mysticism, paganism and a new spirituality. In "Why Jesus?" Zacharias says He directs the reader not to an idea, not to a place, but to a person – Jesus Christ.

Authentic faith in Christ, Zacharias writes, can be based only on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as revealed in the Bible, *"the only source of truth"*, He reckons. But truth has fallen out of favor among the various forms of contemporary spirituality, with proponents of what he calls the New Spirituality encouraging people to discard faith, reason, relevance and truth and instead embrace relativism. In the process, Jesus has been demoted from His rightful place as the resurrected Son of God to the role of admired leader, wise teacher and influential prophet. Dr. Zacharias lambasts four decades of American religious life that he says has resulted in an "a la carte" spirituality that runs counter to genuine faith in Christ.

Zacharias, who has studied the works of leading New Thought authors for years, claims they end up saying nothing of substance. Zacharias reminds us the media can cleverly influence two of humanity's most precious traits – feelings and imagination. He describes how over several decades, in the midst of cultural rebellion, religious scandals and postmodern relativism, the New Spirituality has spread.

Zacharias highlights a key point – the current culture's lack of knowledge about "the biblical Jesus" – linked with the deliberate misrepresentation of Jesus that the New Spirituality advocates. His view of the very same "biblical Jesus" lacks a scholarly approach though. He does not even seem to know the difference between the historical Jesus and the Christ of Faith image that developed long after the death of Jesus. The author states, *"This is the strongest indictment I make against the New Spirituality. They have violated the true Jesus and formed Him in their own image. While exalting themselves, they have denigrated Him"*.

Dr. Zacharias is a very learned person who seems to have thoroughly researched what He is criticizing. I prefer him rather than many Fundamentalists who are very quick to lambast something they don't know anything about. He also knows exactly how to poison the wells when he's trying to debunk something, and how to defend what he is supposedly defending. Epistemology is; how we arrive at the truth measurement of a philosophy, while hermeneutics is the science of interpretation (in our case; biblical interpretation). Dr. Zacharias does not hide the fact that His epistemology and

hermeneutics is strictly boxed inside the Systematic Theology of Evangelicalism. He can't view Jesus outside of this box that He sees as absolute truth. I wonder if He ever thought of the fact that St. Paul himself says his OWN WORDS are errant, incomplete, through a dark mirror, through a mist, partial truth etc. Dr. Zacharias does not seem to agree with St. Paul on the above!

Why NOT the New Spirituality's Expansive Consciousness and all embracing Jesus?

Why Dr. Ravi Zacharias' constricting, highly dogmatic and limiting Jesus? Myself, and millions of others, have left Evangelicalism simply because *the Jesus of Evangelicalism* no longer made sense in our highly pluralistic postmodern context. The New Spirituality that He criticizes so much works; otherwise, millions would not be flocking to it. Since Dr. Zacharias has written so much on his vision of what He calls "*The Biblical Jesus*", I would like to offer him a different version of the same Biblical Jesus He so hopelessly tried to promote. He will then be able to evaluate The New Spirituality in the light of this:

Can Dr. Zacharias embrace the truth that, *Jesus is the same; yesterday, today, and forever?* – The truth that; Jesus is challenging Orthodox Christianity in the 21st century, the very same way Christ challenged Orthodox Judaism in the first century? – The truth that, Jesus was a Revolutionary Jew who was raised in the Jewish tradition (just like Dr. Zacharias is raised in a Christian tradition)? – The truth that, Jesus defied and subverted all the rules, dogmas, creeds, and impositions that Judaism used to get him not to reach out to those seen as "other" by Judaism. The same conformity to dogmas and beliefs is happening today with Dr. Zacharias Theology in *WHY JESUS!*

CAN DR. RAVI ZACHARIAS THINK THROUGH THIS BIBLICAL JESUS?

- **JESUS** embraced the lepers whose rotting flesh was condemned as untouchable by the Scripture quoting religious tradition.
- **JESUS** allowed the touch of the woman with chronic menstrual discharge; the religious tradition quoted Scripture that said that She was corrupting and unclean.
- **JESUS** set aside the Sabbath tradition when it conflicted with human needs. Scripture quoting Pharisees could not accept this.
- **JESUS** called Levi Matthew, a Jew who worked for the Romans as a Tax Collector and was therefore unclean according to Jewish ritual laws. Jesus went into a Tax Collector's house and actually ate with them! – This was anathema in the Jewish tradition.
- **JESUS** refused to condemn the woman taken in adultery, as the Fundamentalists quoted Scriptures which dictated that She be stoned to death.
- **JESUS** embraced Samaritans, Gentiles, Syrophoenicians, etc – who were the prejudiced minority according to Jewish Scriptures. The LGBT Community represents these people today.
- **JESUS** opened the way for those regarded as outsiders to be reconciled. He was subverting doctrines, beliefs, prejudices, and religious Scriptural doctrines that kept them outside.
- **JESUS** was labeled as one who; "has a demon" and a "drunkard," but never "hateful", "self-righteous," or "ignorant". Jesus dealt with hateful Pharisees on a daily basis.
- **JESUS** chose the marginalized minority over the dominant Scripture quoting religious people of his day. Jesus would be at home with the marginalized LGBT community today; Again; the dominant Scripture quoting religious people demand they be marginalized & dehumanized.

- **JESUS** spoke of God judging on the basis of feeding the hungry; welcoming strangers; clothing the naked; caring for the sick; visiting prisoners and living compassionately.

Evangelical Christianity got the idea of God and Jesus of Nazareth very badly wrong! Can the likes of Dr. Zacharias dare to embrace the possibility that the New Spirituality he attacks so vehemently; and other expressions of Post-modern awakenings, are the Second Coming of Christ? The Second Coming of God who is present as the consciousness of every human being? Can we dare to embrace the possibility that we; ourselves are The Second Coming of Christ? Only time will tell!

It is not my intention to engage in a long Biblical Scholarship debate with Dr. Ravi Zacharias. He is well aware of opposing Theologies. He is also well aware of, THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST, as well as the unveiling of, THE COSMIC CHRIST. Dr. Zacharias' constricted thinking reflects a very conditioned and limiting view of Jesus, as prescribed by Evangelical Theology. *Evangelical Theology seems incapable of embracing mystery, especially ultimate mystery of Christ.* I've realized from his many postings that, He is well aware of the innovations of The Jesus Seminar Scholars, Emergent Spirituality, Mysticism, Neuroscience and Neuro-Theology. Dr. Zacharias has been with the Evangelical consciousness for more than forty years now (I also stayed 'the biblical 40 years' inside); time will tell whether his spiritual path in the present consciousness evolves or remains the same.

We all pass through different stages of consciousness. Everyone has their own particular path divinely planned for them. In the light of this; Dr. Ravi Zacharias may or may not take a different path in his own Spiritual Journey. His future spiritual path is deeply hard-wired inside his brain! --- "It ALL depends on the wiring of his brain", - so says leading Neuroscientists. Whatever path his Spiritual Journey may not take in the future, I wish him good luck; in whatever direction his path takes.

FINALLY, Dr. Ravi Zacharias has to understand the need to keep on reformulating religion for the sake of the coming generations. Our post-theistic, post Enlightenment, post Darwin, and postmodern generation seeks a Jesus that speaks to their world, not a Jesus

viewed through a first century lens, hence the New Spirituality. The older lens through which Dr. Zacharias still interprets the Bible has made Christianity incredible and irrelevant to many postmodern people. May I remind Dr. Zacharias of this quote by Jesuit Theologian, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin; "*Christ must be born again; He must be re-incarnated in a world that has become different from the one in which He lived*". I suggest Dr. Ravi Zacharias be not be frightened, but just allow the process of evolution to continue.

CHRIST CONSCIOUSNESS MEDITATION

Through meditation, we *become aware of the presence of the Christ*, and this awareness remains with us all day and all night as we go about our human existence. This awareness enters into our every experience and prospers every endeavor. This consciousness of the presence of the Christ is a light unto our feet and a guiding star unto our aspirations. It is the Presence that goes before us to make the crooked places straight. It is the quality in our consciousness that makes us understood and be appreciated by others.

BEGINNERS GUIDE TO MEDITATION

The minute you wake up in the morning and realize, "*I and my Father are one*," you are meditating; you are going within and realizing the *inner reality of being*. Even if you declare this once with your eyes closed, you have meditated on that particular idea. If you sit quietly pondering, "*Just as the wave is one with the ocean, just as a sunbeam is not something separate from the sun, but really an emanation of the sun itself, so, I AM I ONE WITH GOD*". - By pondering your ONENESS WITH GOD, you are meditating. Do not plan or think about any prescribed length of time when you enter meditation. If you think of the length of time, you may begin to think of the end of the period of meditation instead of leaving it alone and letting it work itself out.

Do not take any of your problems into your meditation. Begin with a statement of truth that appeals to you or with some statement that you want to understand better. You may repeat the idea, "*I and my Father are ONE*" several times with your eyes closed. You do not even have to say it out loud. The thought may come; ... ".... *I - if there is only one 'I', - that 'I' is God. -- I AND THE FATHER ARE ONE and my being ONE with The Father makes all of The Father ONE with me, and it makes me ONE with ALL of The Father It makes me ONE with The Universe trees, birds, circles, stars, squares, nature, music, science, religions, etc. (allow whatever ideas The Spirit brings in your silence - BE STILL ANF KNOW GOD IS SILENCE BEYOND THOUGHT....*

Disregard the thoughts that come into your meditation. As a beginner, you will quickly lose the thread and find yourself thinking about whether you are missing your appointment at the office, or missing the bus or the train. Your thoughts may wander into many areas. at that point ... gently, bring your thought back into the statement, "I AND MY FATHER ARE ONE....". Do not become impatient with yourself; Do not condemn yourself; Do not judge yourself; Do not blame yourself; Do not criticize yourself; Do not think you are hopeless; Pay no attention to the wandering of the mind, but gently bring your attention back and begin again, bring the idea of any other GOD CONSCIOUSNESS idea that comes into your Spirit. As many times as your thought wanders from the idea, gently come back to the idea again, with no impatience, criticism, or judgement of yourself. BE VERY KIND TO YOUR SWEET SELF!

A 30 second meditation; - Close your eyes and say, *...I AND MY FATHER ARE ONE...* (this takes 10 seconds)..... keep your eyes closed for 20 seconds and ponder the idea

You can practice this for as many times as you want! - DON'T BE HARD ON YOURSELF FOR FAILING TO DO IT!

FORMING CHRIST WITHIN YOU

To help you develop a true knowledge of Christ, take the term, THE CHRIST, into your meditation, beginning with a very humble statement, "I know so little about this; Father reveal it to me". Close your eyes, and keep your attention centered on THE CHRIST. Every time your mind tries to wander, gently bring it back. If you do this, whether it happens the first, second, third, or nineteenth time - ultimately, you will catch the vision of the real meaning of THE CHRIST. A meaning that you will never quite be able to explain to anyone else; BUT, you yourself will KNOW it, because THE CHRIST will be an actual presence in your consciousness. It will be a power, and influence, a being, YOU - yet it will be something that you cannot define. You will just have a KNOWING that, - whatever it is; YOU ARE IT!

Before Abraham, THE CHRIST IS; - Even unto the end of the world, THE CHRIST - IS.

SILENCE THE MIND AND FOCUS ON YOUR BODY

To meditate is "to fix the mind upon; to engage in continuous and contemplated thought; dwell mentally on anything; ruminate and cogitate."

In the spiritual tongue, meditation is prayer. *True prayer or meditation is not thinking about ourselves or our problems, but rather the contemplation of God and God-activities, the nature of God, and the nature of the world that God has created.* Everyone should take some time daily to retire to a quiet spot for meditation. During this period, he should turn his thought to God, consider his understanding of God, and search out a deeper understanding of the nature of Spirit and Its formations. He should be careful not to take any of his ills or other problems into his meditation. This particular period is set aside, dedicated and consecrated to thinking about God and God's universe.

On awakening in the morning, and preferably before you get out of bed, turn your thought to the realization that "*I and my Father are one Son . . . all that I have is thine . . . The place whereon thou standest is holy ground*"; and then let the meaning of these statements unfold from within your own consciousness. *Gain a conviction of your oneness with the Father, with the universal Life, the universal Consciousness.* Feel the infinity of good within you which is the evidence of your oneness with the infinite Source of your being. As soon as you begin to feel a stirring within you, a sense of peace, or the surge of divine Life, then get out of bed and make your physical preparations for the day. Before leaving your home, sit down and ponder your oneness with God.

Meditation must never become a mental effort. Never place a time limit on meditation. The very minute that it begins to be a bore it should be stopped. Never let it become an effort. Do not strain. You are not going to get into the Kingdom of God by force. If your meditation has been only for one and half minutes duration, be satisfied, because if you have been holding on to the idea of God for but half a minute, you have been opening your consciousness - you have started an inflow of truth. You may not get an answer at that moment, although you may get one twelve hours later or possibly

twelve days later. The important thing is that you have opened consciousness to the inflow of truth.

To begin with; meditate three times daily, or at least twice - morning and night. There is nobody who cannot do that, because everybody gets up and everybody goes to bed. As you continue this practice, some of you will find that, between getting up in the morning and going to bed at night, there is another interval of two or three minutes to give to meditation. This process will stretch itself into many intervals and longer periods. After this becomes an almost regular part of your daily routine, gradually, you are going to find that you can meditate at any hour of the day or night - sometimes for half a second, and sometimes for a minute. Even while driving your car, doing housework, or sitting and talking to a person; - when the robot closes, before you start your car, while you shower, eat, read, play, etc.

The wave is one with the ocean, indivisible and inseparable from the whole ocean. All that the ocean is; - the wave is; all the power; all the energy; all the strength; the life and all the substance of the ocean are expressed in every wave. The wave has access to all that lies beneath it, for the wave really is the ocean, just as the ocean is the wave, inseparable, indivisible, one. Note here this very important point: *There is no place where one wave comes to an end and the next wave begins, so the oneness of the wave with the ocean includes the oneness of every wave with every other wave.*

IMAGINE A WAVE AND THE OCEAN

As a wave is one with the ocean, so you are one with God. Your oneness with the universal Life constitutes your oneness with every individual expression of that Life; your oneness with the divine Consciousness constitutes your oneness with every idea of Consciousness. As the infinity of God surges through you to bless all with whom you come in contact, remember that the infinity of God is also surging through every other individual on earth to you. No one is sharing anything with you that is of himself, but all that he has is of the Father and you are sharing it with the all the world. *You are one with the Father,* with the universal Consciousness, and you are one with every spiritual idea of which this Consciousness is conscious.

This is a tremendous idea if you can grasp it. It means that your interest is the interest of every individual in the world; it means that we have no interest apart from each other even as we have no interest apart from God; it means actually that all the Father has is ours and all that we have is for the benefit of everyone else, as everything that they have is for our benefit, and all for the glory of God. This idea must unfold within you in an original way. It must, bit by bit and day by day, unfold, in different ways, and always with greater meaning because of the *Infinity of Consciousness*. You might note how a tree has many branches and how all of these branches are one with the trunk of the tree and, therefore, with the root of the tree, that the root of the tree is one with the earth and is drawing into it all that the earth possesses, and furthermore, that each branch is not only one with the whole tree but each branch is one with every branch, connected parts of one whole.

As you ponder this idea of your oneness with God and your oneness with every individual spiritual idea, new ideas will unfold to you, new illustrations, original illustrations and symbols.

YOU ARE THE PRESENCE YOU FEEL

By the time you have concluded this morning meditation, you will find that you will actually feel the presence of God within you; you will actually feel the divine energy of Spirit; you will feel the surge of new life within you; and this, too will lead on to other thoughts. *When ever you leave one place to go on to another place, such as leaving your home for business or leaving your business for church or going back to your home, pause for a second to realize that the Presence has gone before you to prepare the way, and that that same divine Presence remains behind you as a benediction to all who pass that way.* At first you may forget to do this many times during the day, but by jogging your memory you will eventually find that this will become an established activity of your consciousness and you will never make a move without realizing the divine Presence ahead of you and behind you, and in this way you will find yourself to be the light of the world.

One of the subjects near and dear to us these past few years is that of peace, but we can have little faith in any perpetual peace based on whatever human documents or organizations can be formulated. True, they have their purpose and they are a necessary step for human beings just as the Ten Commandments were a necessary step until the Sermon on the Mount replaced them with a higher vision. We do not need the Ten Commandments because we need no admonition not to steal or lie or cheat, nor do we need any threat of punishment to keep us honest, clean, and pure; but the Ten Commandments are necessary to those who have not yet learned righteousness for righteousness' sake.

In the same way the world is greatly in need of some kind of human organization and some kind of human document to keep some form or some measure of peace in the world. But the real peace, the lasting peace, will only come as it has come to us individually through the realization that we do not need anything that the other person has and, therefore, there is nothing to war about. *All that the Father has is ours.* What can we want besides that? As a matter of fact, as joint-heirs with Christ in God, we could feed five thousand any day and every day without ever taking thought as to whence it should come.

As God is the mind and Soul of every individual, it is possible for all of us to be tuned in to the kingdom of God and receive the divine messages and assurances and benefits of the one infinite Love. The grace of God which we receive in these periods of meditation or prayer, becomes tangible to us in the fulfilling of our so-called human needs. If we do not open our consciousness to receive spiritual understanding, we must not be surprised if we do not experience spiritual good in our daily living. There is no other way to open our consciousness to the realm of Soul than through meditation or prayer, through contemplating the things of God. *"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee."*

All through the day our thoughts are centered on the activities of human experience, on family cares and duties and the earning of a livelihood, on social and community affairs, and sometimes even on the greater affairs of state. Is it not natural that in some time during the day or evening we take time off to retire to our inner

consciousness, which is the temple of God, and there dwell upon the things of God? Above all, we must develop the sense of receptivity so that we can become ever more aware of the very presence of God in his holy temple which is our consciousness. In the secret place of the most High, which is the Holy of Holies, which is our very own consciousness, we receive illumination, guidance, wisdom, and spiritual power. *"In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength."*

As we learn to listen to the "still small voice," the Spirit of God opens in our consciousness to the immediate awareness of spiritual good. We are filled with the divine energies of Spirit; we are illumined with the light of the Soul; we are refreshed with the water of Life and fed with the meat that does not perish. This spiritual food is never rationed to those who learn to meet God within the temple of their being.

To receive the grace of God, we must retire from the world of sense, we must learn to silence the material senses and have audience with God. God must become to us a living reality, a divine presence, a Holy Spirit within, and this can only be when we have learned to meditate, to pray, and to contemplate God.

When all mankind comes into this consciousness of its true identity, there will be no wars, no competition, no strife. As we gain the full consciousness of our true identity, we show it forth in a greater sense of harmony, health, and success, and one by one we attract others who are seeking the same way. In this way all men will ultimately be brought into the kingdom of heaven.

Joel S Goldsmith (1892-1964) - Master Spiritual Teacher

THE EVOLUTION OF THE BIBLE

Have you ever asked yourself how the Bible came to be the way it is? Was the Bible always made up of 66 books? What stages did the Bible go through in the +3000 years of its history? To many devotional readers; the Bible -- being a perfect book, written by forty writers all inspired by God -- has remained unchanged for thousands of years. This claim, when made by a layman, shows his ignorance and illiteracy on the Bible, and when made by a religious authority, is dishonest and misleading. The current Reformation requires Christians to be very LITERATE on Biblical Scholarship; otherwise many Christians will find themselves with egg on their faces!

Many Christians believe that all of the books of the Bible, and ONLY the books of their Bible, have always been accepted as canonical by all Christians; *all the time*. And yet, how far from this is the truth? In every age of the church there have been Christians, eminent for their piety and learning, who either rejected some of these books, or who accepted as canonical books not contained in the our Bible. What we call THE BIBLE (which is a western version); was authorized ONLY in 1647 by the Protestant Westminster Confession!

BIBLE HISTORY

The Bible was written by at least 150 different people, in dozens of different places at different times, many centuries apart, and for different reasons. The biblical authors were human too! They had likes, dislikes, opinions, views, prejudices, biases, perspectives, and so on, like the rest of us; and all these things affected how they saw the world and wrote the scriptures. This simple fact is widely ignored by Christians. The focus of my post is the New Testament.

For more than forty years, I did not know that; what Jews, Catholics and Protestants call "the Bible" are different books with totally varying numbers and contents. I did not know that this book I call "the Bible" has been changing from century to century, with various books being included and excluded depending on the theological and Imperial climate of the time.

There was no Bible in the second century CE (only the Old Testament or 'Hebrew Bible'). The book of Revelation was only

included in the fourth century. The books of 1st Clement and the Apocalypse of Peter were removed in the third century. The list goes on. The Gospels were not written by the disciples, but were written two to three generations after the death of Jesus. They were written 35 to 70 years after the death of Jesus. Mark was written in 70-72 CE, Mathew in 82–85 CE; Luke in 88-93 CE, and John in 95-100 CE. Mathew copied 90 percent of Mark into his gospel and Luke copied 50 percent of Mark. Gospels are human constructs interpreting the person and wisdom of Christ in human language. The book of Revelation was written around 100 CE; which meant Revelation is midway in the writing of the New Testament. This understanding itself collapses a lot of Eschatology's and Systematic Theologies built around the idea that Revelation is the last written book of the Bible.

The Gospels were written in a language that neither Jesus nor his disciples could speak or write, namely Greek. Paul's genuine epistles were written between 51-64 CE. "Paul's" other epistles (11 Thessalonians, Colossians, and Ephesians) were written well after Paul's death (around 65 CE), but were contemporaries with the Gospels. Pastoral epistles (1 & 11 Timothy, Titus) were written between 90-100 CE. The Epistles of John (I, II, III), and Revelation were also written between 95 CE and 105 CE. 1 & 11 Peter, James, and Jude were all written in the second century. There are, of course, hundreds of other books that did not make it into the canon when it was finalized in the fourth century. No one has the original manuscripts of any of the books of the New Testament, but ONLY copies – over 5000 copies, just in the Greek language in which these books were originally written.

DEAD SEA SCROLLS

The discovery of the *Dead Sea Scrolls* (1946-1956) has revealed lots of textual mistakes in the Hebrew Bible that was used to interpret the New Testament. The Scrolls, dating to about the first century C.E., demonstrate that there were several versions of scripture in distribution-- some that are claimed by scholars to be even more extensive, and of better quality, than those found in our modern bibles. Some of the most familiar verses of the New Testament were not originally part of the text, but were added by scribes, after the Reformation, when the Bible went to English-speaking lands.

Not one of the five Church Fathers, who contributed most to form the canon, *Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement, Jerome, and Augustine*, accepted all of these books. The Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, and Protestant Canons; were all fixed by modern councils (no two of which are alike). *The Hebrew Bible* is different from any other Bible. *The Greek Easter Orthodox Bible* is different from any other Bible. *The Catholic Bible* is different from any other Bible. *The Protestant Bible* is different from any other Bible. All these Bibles came with the *rise of the Empires*. Our own Bible (the Protestant Bible), came after Martin Luther's Protestant Reformation and came along with *King James's British Empire*. This is the same empire that later colonized America and the rest of the world, thus further spreading the power of the Protestant Bible to the rest of the world. Many Christians who like to quote the Bible do not have this knowledge! Let me start with the last and only Protestant Council to approve the Bible we read as Scripture today;

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION; 1647

After the 16th century Reformation, the Protestant Church did not agree on which books should be contained in the Bible until as late as 1647, at the Assembly of Westminster. The body of Protestant leaders decided that the books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of the Scripture, yet Catholics still view these books as inspired canon. It was both divisions of the Protestant church, German and English; that declared against the authority of the Apocryphal books. The Apocryphal books were removed due to MYTHOLOGY that was in them; the mythology that birthed the Protestors. The books that were deemed to contain Catholic mythology were then removed from the Protestant Bible. The new Bible was then called *The Authorized Version of The Bible* (as authorized by the Westminster Confession of 1647). The Westminster Assembly (1647) formally adopted the list of the 66 books contained in our *Authorized Version of the Bible*. However, this was after many, many disputes by many Protestant leaders themselves. These disputes occurred 1200 years after The Council of Carthage approved the first Bible, which contained more than 100 books. So, our Bible was actually authorized by the Protestant Church Fathers of Westminster Confession ONLY in 1647!

The Protestant Bible was accepted after eliminating the suspected forged letters and Catholic Mythology in the Apocrypha! - YET the very same Protestant Bible was proven by the Enlightenment period to be a book full of MYTHOLOGY! Critical Bible Scholars have over the past two hundred years; discovered that only eight out of twenty seven books, are almost certain to have been written by the people traditionally thought to be their authors. This is after more than almost 2000 years of debates, Council after Council, from the Early Church Fathers to Greek Eastern Orthodox Fathers; to Catholic Fathers; to Protestant Fathers; after removing and adding books; after checking for forgeries an authentic apostolic authorship; going back to Council after Council; then removing and adding in a list of more than 5000 manuscripts; we still remain with MYTHOLOGY!

So, which of the more than twenty Church Councils since the first *Council of Nicaea in 325*, got the message of the Holy Spirit wrong? Many, many Councils had to meet to correct the errors of previous councils! - Our own last *Westminster Confession of 1647* got the Holy Spirit wrong about SLAVERY, through allowing New Testament Scriptures that condoned this diabolical practice. Since then; colonization, missions, and Imperialism has resulted in millions of slaves in the name of the Westminster Confession approved New Testament. The Westminster Confession approved this after 1300 years of debates since Nicaea!

Evangelicalism together with The Evangelical Systematic Theology came from 1710 onwards, yet it is quite easy for Evangelical Scholars to neglect 1700 years of Church history and pretend that it's Evangelicals ONLY who have copyright to God.

PROTESTANT LEADER'S OBJECTIONS OVER THE BIBLE

Many Protestant scholars have questioned or denied the correctness of the Protestant Bible. *John Calvin*, founder of Presbyterianism, doubted 2 & 3 John and Revelation. *Erasmus* doubted Hebrews, 2 & 3 John, and Revelation. *Davidson* said that Esther should be excluded from the canon; *Eichorn* rejected Daniel and Jonah in the Old Testament, and 2 Timothy and Titus in the New Testament.

The greatest name in the records of the Protestant church is *Martin Luther*. Luther was a Catholic monk who protested against the orthodox practices of the Catholic Church (hence protestant). He is generally recognized as its founder of The Protestant Church; Luther is considered one of the highest authorities on the Bible; He devoted a large portion of his life to its study; He made a translation of it for his people, a work that is accepted as one of the classics of German literature. With Luther, the Bible superseded the church as *a divine authority*. And yet this greatest Protestant rejected no less than six of the sixty-six books composing the Protestant Bible.

MARTIN LUTHER'S REJECTIONS

- Luther rejected **Esther**: "I am such an enemy to the book of Esther that I wish it did not exist".
- Luther rejected **Jonah**: "The history of Jonah is so monstrous as to be absolutely incredible."
- Luther rejected **Hebrews**: "Hebrews is not by St. Paul; nor, indeed, by any apostle."
- Luther rejected **James**: "St. James' Epistle is truly an epistle of straw."
- Luther rejected **Jude**: "alleged stories and sayings which have no place in Scripture." –
- Luther rejected **Revelation**: "I can discover no trace that it is established by the Holy Spirit."

Martin Luther rejected the above six books and suggested they be taken out of the Protestant Bible that was being discussed in the 16th century. The four books Luther rejected ended being the last four books of the New Testament as a compromise by the Westminster Confession. Martin Luther is known for the hatred He harboured towards the Jewish people. Later, his German companion (Hitler) would kill six million Jews.

CHURCH COUNCILS BEFORE AND AFTER CATHOLICISM

The fact that the books of the Bible, both the Old and New Testament; have undergone change, throughout the centuries and in every century is undeniable. Since the first *Council of Nicaea of 325*, convened by none other than a *Roman Emperor Constantine*, the Bible has gone through revisions that added and eliminated books from it; in more than twenty councils in almost every century over the past 1600 years. Check the following on rejections and acceptances:

- The only books of the bible which are accepted as divine by all Jews and all varieties of Christians are the first five books of the Old Testament: the Pentateuch.
- New Testament Books which are now accepted by Christians, but which were for a time rejected, are; *Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, Revelation*.
- Books now excluded from the canon, but which are found in some of the older manuscripts of the New Testament, are *Shepherd of Hermas, Epistle of Barnabas, 1 Clement, 2 Clement, Paul's Epistle to Laodiceans, Apostolic Constitutions*.
- Books accepted as canonical by some Jews, and for most part by the *Greek and Roman Catholic churches*, but rejected by the Protestants, are; - *Baruch, Tobit, Judith, Book of Wisdom, Song of the Three Children, History of Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, Prayer of Manasseh, Ecclesiasticus, 1 Esdras, 2 Esdras, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, 3 Maccabees, 4 Maccabees, 5 Maccabees*.
- What ever happened to the Gospels according to; *Thomas, Jade, James, Peter, and the Gospel of the Hebrews, of the Egyptians, of Perfection, of Judas, of Thaddeus, of the Infancy, of the Preaching of Peter, of the Shepherd of Hermas, the Epistle of Barnabas, the Pastor of Hermas, the Revelation of Peter, the Revelation of Paul, the Epistle of Clement, the Epistle of Ignatius, the Gospel of Mary, the Gospel of Nicodemus and of Marcion?* They were all not considered inspired (or inspired enough). They did not get

voted in. There were also the *Acts of Pilate, of Andrew, of Mary, of Paul and Thecla*, and many others. If the bishops at the *Council of Laodicea in 365* had voted differently, millions of Christians would have believed differently. Many books got into the Bible for purely political reasons.

- There are lost books of the bible, which should have been included into the canon. These books are *cited by writers of the Protestant Bible*, and they are: *Book of the Wars of the Lord, Book of Jasher, Book of the Covenant, Book of Nathan, Book of Gad, Book of Samuel, Prophecy of Ahijah, Visions of Iddo, Acts of Uzziah, Acts of Solomon, Three Thousand Proverbs of Solomon, A Thousand and Five Songs of Solomon, Chronicles of the Kings of Judah, Chronicles of the Kings of Israel, Book of Jehu, Book of Enoch.*

For nearly two hundred years after the beginning of the Christian era, the Old Testament -- the Old Testament alone constituted the Christian canon. No other books were called scripture; no other books were considered inspired; no other books were deemed canonical. These are the books St. Paul cited when He said, "*ALL Scripture is inspired ...*"

EARLY CHURCH FATHER'S OBJECTIONS

- **JUSTIN MARTYR** knew nothing of a New Testament canon. For Justin, divine authority and inspiration were only in the Old Testament.
- **ORIGEN**; the great Christian Father of the third century, doubted the authority of the Epistle to the Hebrews, James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John; while, at the same time, He recognized certain apocryphal scriptures, such as Hermas and Barnabas. In addition these apocryphal books, Origen also accepted as authoritative the Gospel of the Hebrews, Gospel of the Egyptians, Acts of Paul, and Preaching of Peter.
- **EUSEBIUS**; the great Church historian of the fourth century gave a list of the acknowledged and disputed books of the New Testament. The disputed books-- books which some accepted and others rejected-- were Hebrews, James,

Second and Third John, Jude, Revelation, Shepherd of Hermas, Epistle of Barnabas, Acts of Paul, and Revelation of Peter.

- **ATHANASIUS** rejected Esther
- **EPIPHANIUS** accepted the Epistle of Jeremiah.
- **CYRIL, Bishop of Jerusalem,** and **GREGORY, Bishop of Constantinople,** both rejected Revelation.
- **CHRYSOSTOM,** the person who came with the name Bible (from biblia – library) omitted ten books from his suggested Bible -- First and Second Chronicles, Esther, Job, and Lamentations and 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, Jude, and Revelation.
- **CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA** classed as having inferior authority, Hebrews, 2 John, Jude, 2 & 3 Epistles of Clement (of Rome), Epistle of Barnabas, Shepherd of Hermas, and Revelation of Peter.
- **TERTULLIAN** (the Father who coined the word “trinity”) placed in an appendix Hebrews, 1 Peter, 2 John, Jude, and the Shepherd of Hermas.
- **IRENÆUS** decided that the Gospels chosen should be four only (from the many available); because "there are four quarters of the earth in which we live, and four universal winds", He suggested

Church historians tell us that Christians of the first century were divided into many sects; the principal sects were grouped into three divisions:

- **The PETRINE Churches,** comprising the church of Rome and other churches which recognized Peter as the chief of the apostles and the visible head of the church on earth;
- **The PAULINE Churches,** which accepted Paul as the true exponent of Christianity;
- **The JOHANNINE or Eastern Churches,** which regarded John as their founder. A collection of books to be acceptable to all of these churches must contain the favourite books of each.

ALL THIS INFORMATION IS NOW FREELY AVAILABLE ON THE INTERNET! - YOU NO LONGER NEED TO GO TO UNIVERSITY TO ACCESS THIS INFORMATION. SEARCH TAGS: *Church History; Early Church Fathers; Church Councils*; or any of the names in bold. IGNORANCE IS A CHOICE TODAY!

BIBLE QUOTING AND BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP

Many devotional readers of the Bible like to proof text verses out of the Bible; not knowing how the same verses fit inside the scholarship of the Bible. The two most quoted verses are *2 Timothy 3:16 and Revelation 22:18*:

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.

2 Timothy 3:16

When St. Paul (assuming He wrote Timothy) wrote the above words; 80% (eighty percent) of the New Testament was yet written. St. Paul didn't know anything about the Gospels and books that came later. What was St. Paul talking about when He said, "All Scripture is inspired..."? Did He mean the letter He was writing to Timothy? Did He mean the Old Testament scrolls? Did He mean the more than 5000 copies that never made it into the Bible that was approved by the Council of Cathage in 394?

I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds (or subtracts) to them, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book.

Revelation 22:18,19

When John of Patmos wrote around 97 - 100 CE, which scripture was He saying should not be subtracted or added on? Was He talking about the book of Revelation that He was busy writing? It can't be a canon that was not there when He wrote! – Scholars tell of forgeries that were rife in the 1st and 2nd centuries. St Paul even had to write warning the Church on letters forged in his name. Was John not using the tactic to make sure no one forged the book He was penning?

It's of interest to me that the majority of Protestant Fathers did not want *2 & 3 John* included in the Bible! – The main reason was that these books were mainly based on early Church factional

disputes over the Anti-Christ. Most of the content of the book is actually about settling scores over the identity of the Anti-Christ. Evangelical ministers use the very disputed books to identify people as Anti-Christ! 2 & 3 John were used as political writings as first century Churches (*Petrine, Pauline & Johannine*) were fighting each other over which ones were the true representatives of Christs and which were not.

THE FUTURE OF THE BIBLE!

What now? - Protestant Christianity has fractured into thousands of splinter groups over its 500 - year history! - There will never be another Church Council that will be unanimously accepted by Mainline, Evangelical, Pentecostal, Charismatic and thousands of independent ministries. *The Westminster Confession of 1647* will definitely be the last Church Council. *What went wrong?*

It is my opinion that we have confused “the word of God” with human words or textual words in a book. If “the Word was in the beginning” (John 1:1) then the WORD is bigger than human words or textual words. THE WORD precedes all words by 15 billion years, at least! My teacher and 14th century mystic, Meister Eckhart said, “every creature is a word of God and a book about God.” this carries us far beyond the overly anthropocentric idea of the Bible alone as the “word of God”. I go to Book Shops (secular and religious), magazines, libraries, radio talk shows, etc. to find “the word of God”. Many Christians are not aware that the notion of ‘the Bible alone’ (*sola scriptura*) being the “word of God” emerged with the printing press after the Reformation. We today find the word of God in science. We go to Psychologists, even ‘secular’ ones, to discover the “word of God” that saves our marriages. The science inspired events that occurred after the Reformation, have changed our un-informed, unquestioning, and ignorant approach to reading the Bible.

As a book deeply influenced by the Judaeo-Christian tradition, it is very easy for us who were raised in this tradition to think that; Jews or Catholics or Christians have *a copyright on God*. There is no book in the world that has deeply influenced the Church and Christian culture. Theologians and Ministers of the gospel have always read into the Bible the kind of things people of their time and

culture wanted to hear, or perhaps, the only things that, within their culture, they *could* hear. The Bible was a very important book and will remain an important *library reference* as UNIVERSAL SPIRITUALITY gains momentum. There's a lot of good and bad stories in the Bible that will still be used as our talking points as UNIVERSAL SPIRITUALITY evolves a NEW WORLD!

We have all been challenged, by things we have read in the Bible; but this is different from then saying the Bible is *in reality* the supreme authority the way the Pope was. Any church or faith community that makes the Bible or any holy book its supreme authority ends up being the supreme authority itself. When Pastors say *the Bible is authority*, they actually mean that; *they or their church's INTERPRETATION of the Bible is THE SUPREME AUTHORITY*. All people who make these claims will never subject their claims to the enquiry of biblical scholarship because such claims will crumble in the light of deep biblical scrutiny and enquiry.

Biblical fundamentalism has never, and will never, survive a genuine study of the Bible. I love the Bible and continue to use it as my map to go to truths that are deeper than the "literal truths" of the past two thousand years. It is the non-literal truths and the mythical truths in the Bible that makes it "the word of the Lord" for me. I love the Bible for the inconsistencies, incompatibilities, and contradictions, hyperbole, and *midrashic* elements that makes me enter into the ancient life and think deeply on the experiences and thought life of those who wrote it and how the concept of God and spirituality has evolved since then.

The Bible has to be kept as it is, with all the original language, inconsistencies, propaganda, politics, and contradictions, or else we will lose the value of entering into its ancient thought life. There is a time to read the Bible as the word of God. There is a time to read it NOT as the word of God.

HOW AND WHY JESUS SPOKE ON HELL

I have decided to repost this as A NOTE because of its importance. This is THE BEST information I've ever read on the subject of hell. Brian McLaren brings together Secular history, Jewish history, Hermeneutics, Linguistics, and Logic to offer a very clear EXEGESIS on the subject of hell. A subject that is very dear to Evangelical Fundamentalists. Read for your continued learning:

MANY PEOPLE HAVE been given a very tame and uninteresting version of Jesus; He was a nice, quiet, gentle, perhaps somewhat fragile guy on whose lap children liked to sit. He walked around in flowing robes in pastel colors, freshly washed and pressed, holding a small sheep in one arm and raising the other as if hailing a taxi. Or he was like an “x” or “n”—an abstract part of a mathematical equation, not important primarily because of what he said or how he lived, but only because he filled a role in a cosmic calculus of damnation and forgiveness.

THE REAL JESUS was far more complex and interesting than any of these caricatures. And nowhere was he more defiant, subversive, courageous, and creative than when *he took the language of fire and brimstone from his greatest critics and used it for a very different purpose.*

The idea of hell entered Jewish thought rather *late*. In Jesus' day, as in our own, more traditional Jews—especially those of the Sadducee party—had little to say about the afterlife, about miracles, about angels and the like. Their focus was on this life and on how to be good, just, and successful human beings within it. More liberal Jews—especially of the *Pharisee* party—had welcomed ideas on the afterlife from neighboring cultures and religions, especially the *Persians*.

To the north and east in Mesopotamia, people believed that the souls of the dead migrated to an *underworld* whose geography resembled an ancient walled city. Good and evil, high born and lowly, all descended to this shadowy, scary, dark, inescapable realm. For the Egyptians to the south, the newly departed faced a ritual trial of judgment. Bad people who failed the test; were then devoured by a crocodile-headed deity; and good people who passed the test settled in the land beyond the sunset.

To the west, the Greeks had a more elaborate schema. Although there were many permutations, in general souls were sorted into four groups at death: the holy and heroic, the indeterminate, the curably evil, and the incurably evil. The incurably evil went to Tartarus, where they would experience *eternal conscious torment*. The holy and heroic were admitted to the Elysian Fields, a place of joy and peace. Those in-between might be sent back to Earth for multiple reincarnations until they could be sorted into a final category.

Then there were the *Persian Zoroastrians* to the east. In Zoroastrianism; recently departed souls, would be judged by two angels; - Rashnu and Mithra. The worthy would be welcomed into the house of Ohrmazd, the Zoroastrian version of heaven. The unworthy would be banished to hell, the realm of Ahriman, a Satanic figure.

A large number of Jews had been exiles in the *Persian Empire in the 6th century B.C.E.*, and the Persians ruled over the Jews for about 150 years after they returned to rebuild Jerusalem. After that, the Greeks ruled and tried to impose their culture and religion. So it's not surprising that some Jews adopted Persian and Greek ideas of the afterlife. *In fact, the Pharisees may have picked up their name from the old word for Persian—Parsi or Farsi.* For Jews who embraced some mixture of Persian and other ideas into their vision of the afterlife, the heaven-bound could be easily identified. They were like the Pharisees—religiously knowledgeable and observant, socially respected, economically prosperous, and physically well-off. The hell-bound were just as easily identified: the opposite of the Pharisees—uninformed about religious lore, careless about religious rules, socially suspect, economically poor, and physically disadvantaged.

Jesus clearly agreed with the Pharisees that there was an afterlife. Death was not the end for Jesus. But one of the most striking facets of his life and ministry was the way he took the Pharisees' understanding of the afterlife and turned it upside down and inside out.

Who was going to hell? Rich and successful people who lived in fancy houses and stepped over their destitute neighbors who slept in the gutters outside their gates! Proud people who judged, insulted, excluded, avoided, and accused others! Hypocrites who

“strained out gnats and swallowed camels!” In other words, who was going to hell? *People just like the Pharisees!* The judgment they so freely pronounced on others, Jesus turned back on them.

And who, according to Jesus, was going to heaven? The very people whom the Pharisees despised, deprived, avoided, excluded, and condemned! Heaven’s gates opened wide for the poor and destitute who shared in few of life’s blessings; the sinners, the sick, and the homeless who felt superior to nobody and who therefore appreciated God’s grace and forgiveness all the more; even the prostitutes and tax collectors! In other words, all the people the Pharisees were careful to avoid were exactly the ones who would someday be welcomed into heaven! Imagine how this overturning of traditional language of hell must have shocked everyone—multitudes and Pharisees alike.

AGAIN AND AGAIN, Jesus took conventional language and imagery for hell and flipped it. We might say he wasn’t so much teaching about hell as he was *un-teaching* about hell. In so doing, he proposed a vastly different understanding of the afterlife. But far more important and radical, he proposed a transformative vision of God. God isn’t the one who condemns the poor and weak. God isn’t the one who favors the rich and righteous. God isn’t the one who ordains the rich to be in the castle and the poor to be in the gutter. God is the one who loves everyone, including the people the rest of us think don’t count. Those parables we’ve used to scare people about hell, it turns out, weren’t intended to teach us about hell: They used the language of hell to teach us a radical new vision of God!

Jesus used fire and brimstone language in another way as well. He used it to warn his compatriots about the catastrophe of following their current road—a wide and smooth highway leading to another violent uprising against the Romans. Violence won’t produce peace, he warned; it will only produce more violence. If his compatriots persisted in their current path, Jesus warned, the Romans would get revenge on them by taking their greatest pride—the temple—and reducing it to ashes and rubble. That’s why he advocated a different path—a “rough and narrow path” of peace and reconciliation instead of their broad highway of hate and violence.

The Pharisees rejected both Jesus' alternative portrayal of God and his warnings about a violent uprising. In fact, the Pharisees joined with the Zealots and became leaders in a rebellion against the Roman Empire in 67 C.E. Their grand scheme succeeded for a time, but then in 70 C.E., the Romans marched in and crushed the rebellion. Just as Jesus warned, Jerusalem was devastated and the temple was destroyed. The nation was even worse off after its revolution than before.

And that's when the Pharisees changed. In many ways, after their failed revolution, they followed a path more like the one Jesus had taught, and they showed that it wasn't too late for even Pharisees to change.

In that outcome, we see the real purpose of Jesus' fire-and-brimstone language. Its purpose was not to predict the destruction of the universe or to make absolute for all eternity the clean-unclean categories of *us* and *them*. Its purpose was to wake up complacent people, to warn them of the danger of their current path, and to challenge them to change—using the strongest language and imagery available. As in the ancient story of Jonah, *God's intent was not to destroy but to save. Neither a great big fish nor a great big fire gets the last word, but rather God's great big love and grace.*

Sadly, many religious people still use the imagery of hell more in the conventional way of the Pharisees. *Like Jonah, they seem disappointed that God's grace would get the final word.* If more of us would re-examine this fascinating dimension of Jesus' teaching and come to a deeper understanding of it, we would see what a courageous, subversive, and fascinating leader he was, pointing us to a radically different way of seeing God, life, and being alive.

Brian D. McLaren *is an author, speaker, and activist based in southwest Florida. Excerpted from We Make the Road by Walking: A Quest for Spiritual Formation, Reorientation, and Activation, by Brian D. McLaren. Copyright © 2014. Reprinted by permission of Jericho Books. All rights reserved.*

THE FUTURE OF RELIGION

In 1998, Westar founder Bob Funk published 21 Theses about the future of religion. Fifteen years later, what are your thoughts?

THEOLOGY

1. The God of the metaphysical age is dead. There is not a personal God out there external to human beings and the material world. We must reckon with a deep crisis in god talk and replace it with talk about whether the universe has meaning and whether human life has purpose.
2. The doctrine of special creation of the species died with the advent of Darwinism and the new understanding of the age of the earth and magnitude of the physical universe. Special creation goes together with the notion that the earth and human beings are at the centre of the galaxy (the galaxy is anthropocentric). The demise of a geocentric universe took the doctrine of special creation with it.
3. The de-literalization of the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis brought an end to the dogma of original sin as something inherited from the first human being. Death is not punishment for sin, but is entirely natural. And sin is not transmitted from generation to generation by means of male sperm, as suggested by Augustine.
4. The notion that God interferes with the order of nature from time to time in order to aid or punish is no longer credible, in spite of the fact that most people still believe it. Miracles are an affront to the justice and integrity of God, however understood. Miracles are conceivable only as the inexplicable; otherwise they contradict the regularity of the order of the physical universe.
5. Prayer is meaningless when understood as requests addressed to an external God for favor or forgiveness and meaningless if God does not interfere with the laws of nature. Prayer as praise is a remnant of the age of kingship in the ancient Near East and is beneath the dignity of deity. Prayer should be understood principally as meditation—as listening rather than talking—and as attention to the needs of neighbor.

CHRISTOLOGY

6. We should give Jesus a demotion. It is no longer credible to think of Jesus as divine. Jesus' divinity goes together with the old theistic way of thinking about God.

7. The plot early Christians invented for a divine redeemer figure is as archaic as the mythology in which it is framed. A Jesus who drops down out of heaven, performs some magical act that frees human beings from the power of sin, rises from the dead, and returns to heaven is simply no longer credible. The notion that he will return at the end of time and sit in cosmic judgment is equally incredible. We must find a new plot for a more credible Jesus.

8. The virgin birth of Jesus is an insult to modern intelligence and should be abandoned. In addition, it is a pernicious doctrine that denigrates women.

9. The doctrine of the atonement—the claim that God killed his own son in order to satisfy his thirst for satisfaction—is sub-rational and sub-ethical. This monstrous doctrine is the stepchild of a primitive sacrificial system in which the gods had to be appeased by offering them some special gift, such as a child or an animal.

10. The resurrection of Jesus did not involve the resuscitation of a corpse. Jesus did not rise from the dead, except perhaps in some metaphorical sense. The meaning of the resurrection is that a few of his followers—probably no more than two or three—finally came to understand what he was all about. When the significance of his words and deeds dawned on them, they knew of no other terms in which to express their amazement than to claim that they had seen him alive.

11. The expectation that Jesus will return and sit in cosmic judgment is part and parcel of the mythological worldview that is now defunct. Furthermore, it undergirds human lust for the punishment of enemies and evildoers and the corresponding hope for rewards for the pious and righteous. All apocalyptic elements should be expunged from the Christian agenda.

GOD'S DOMAIN ACCORDING TO JESUS

12. Jesus advocates and practices a trust ethic. The kingdom of God, for Jesus, is characterized by trust in the order of creation and the essential goodness of neighbor.

13. Jesus urges his followers to celebrate life as though they had just discovered a cache of coins in a field or been invited to a state banquet.

14. For Jesus, God's domain is a realm without social boundaries. In that realm there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, slave nor free, homosexual nor heterosexual, friend nor enemy.

15. For Jesus, God's domain has no brokers, no mediators between human beings and divinity. The Church has insisted on the necessity of mediators in order to protect its brokerage system.

16. For Jesus, the kingdom does not require cultic rituals to mark the rites of passage from outsider to insider, from sinner to righteous, from child to adult, from client to broker.

17. In the kingdom, forgiveness is reciprocal: individuals can have it only if they sponsor it.

18. The kingdom is a journey without end: one arrives only by departing. It is therefore a perpetual odyssey. Exile and exodus are the true conditions of authentic existence.

THE CANON

19. The New Testament is a highly uneven and biased record of orthodox attempts to invent Christianity. The canon of scripture adopted by traditional Christianity should be contracted and expanded simultaneously to reflect respect for the old tradition and openness to the new. Only the works of strong poets—those who startle us, amaze us with a glimpse of what lies beyond the rim of present sight—should be considered for inclusion. The canon should be a collection of scriptures without a fixed text and without either inside or outside limits, like the myth of King Arthur and the knights of the roundtable or the myth of the American West.

20. The Bible does not contain fixed, objective standards of behavior that should govern human behavior for all time. This includes the ten commandments as well as the admonitions of Jesus.

THE LANGUAGE OF FAITH

21. In rearticulating the vision of Jesus, we should take care to express ourselves in the same register as he employed in his parables and aphorisms—paradox, hyperbole, exaggeration, and metaphor. Further, our reconstructions of his vision should be provisional, always subject to modification and correction.

Robert W. Funk (July 18, 1926 – September 3, 2005), was an American biblical scholar, founder of the Jesus Seminar and the nonprofit Westar Institute in Santa Rosa, California. Funk, an academic, sought to promote research and education on what he called biblical literacy. His approach to hermeneutics was historical-critical, with a strongly skeptical view of orthodox Christian belief, particularly concerning historical Jesus. He and his peers described Jesus' parables as containing shocking messages that contradicted established religious attitudes.

APPENDIX ONE

Christ Power

Look at him!
Look not at his divinity
But look rather, at his freedom
Look not at the exaggerated tales of his power
But look, rather at his infinite capacity to give himself away
Look not at the first-century mythology that surrounds him
But look, rather, at his courage to be,
His ability to love; this freedom; this life; this being;
And, when you are accepted, accept yourself;
When you are forgiven, forgive yourself;
When you are loved, love yourself.
Grasp that Christpower and dare to be yourself
Not knowing who we are, we walk in darkness
The ancient ancestors of the human race,
Each night brought something of terror and devastation
No Street lights, No candle lights, No neon lights
Darkness!
A darkness that our primitive forbears could not dispel
Not surprisingly, whatever hurled back the darkness
Became the object of worship
The sun, the moon, the stars, and fire
The worshipped symbols of light versus the demonic powers of
darkness
The Prince of Darkness reigned supreme
In the distortions of the purpose of God's creation
When Christians tell about the birth of their Lord,
They speak of a powerful light

That split the darkness of night: "A light to the Gentiles."

A light is born in the night

Born is a life, whose power of love dispels darkness,

Banishes demons, heals sickness, restores life

Calls people into a new creation

His is a life that reveals what all life was created to be:

Free, whole, giving, loving

"In him was life, and his life was the light of men and women,

And his life shines in darkness,

And the darkness cannot extinguish it."

Love restores life to its true purpose

And light is revealed when love touches us;

And enables us to grasp our humanity,

Fulfil our potential, live our destiny.

"I am the light of the world

The one who follows me will not walk in darkness

But will have the light of life."

Jesus Christ reveals;

The Source of Life, the Ground of Being

The Power of Love;

And so we worship this life.

We worship him by living his freedom,

Sharing in his being,

Giving his love;

and we call him Lord!

I stand in awe of this life, this Christ,

Who is all that life is meant to be.

Jesus of Nazareth is Son of God,

Begotten, not made, light of light,

Very God of very God!

My awe and my reverence for this life can,

And does easily become worship
 Jesus and Christ:
 They are not the same.
 Jesus was a person;
 Christ is a title, a theological principle.
 Christ is beyond history.
 Jesus was of history;
 Christ is beyond history
 Jesus was human, finite, limited;
 Christ is power divine, infinite, unlimited.
 Jesus had a mother and a father,
 A human heritage, he was born and he died.
 Christ is beyond the capacity of the mind to embrace.
 To be in Christ is to come alive.
 To be in Christ is to turn on to life,
 To discover the fullness of living;
 To be in Christ is to know the power of love,
 To experience freedom, wholeness, being;
 So immense is the power of Christ,
 So deep is his appeal that;
 At every stage in life,
 We seem to see him from a different angle,
 To see him with new insight;
 Our Christ is like sea beneath the sun; ever changing, yet ever the
 same!
 The reality I call God;
 Is beyond the power of the human mind fully to grasp,
 Beyond the ability of human words to capture,
 Beyond the feeble attempts of human beings;
 Even to completely describe.
 We grope after the truth, and we see only through a glass darkly.

And who is God?
He is not a being in the sky;
Who thinks and acts;
Who feels and directs.
God is the Source of life;
So, God is seen wherever life is lived,
And God is not alien or separate from that life.
God is the Source of Love;
So, God is seen wherever love is shared,
And God is not alien or separate from that love.
God is the Ground of being;
So, God is seen wherever one has the courage to be,
And God is not alien or separate from that being.
In Jesus of Nazareth;
The fullness of life is lived,
The depth of love is shared,
The courage to be all that one is; is revealed;
So, Jesus reveals life and love and being.
Jesus reveals God
And, whenever God is seen in human life,
We call that power **Christ!**

APPENDIX TWO

CONTRADICTIONS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The announcement of the special birth came before conception.	Lk.1:26-31.
The announcement of the special birth came after conception.	Mt.1:18-21.
Jesus' parents were told of their son's future greatness.	Mt.1:18-21; Lk.1:28-35.
Jesus' parents knew nothing of their son's potential.	Lk.2:48-50.
The angel told Joseph.	Mt.1:20.
The angel told Mary.	Lk.1:28.
Jacob was Joseph's father.	Mt.1:16.
Heli was Joseph's father.	Lk.3:23.
Jesus was tempted during the 40 days in the wilderness.	Mk.1:13.
Jesus was tempted after the 40 days in the wilderness.	Mt.4:2-3.
The devil first took Jesus to the pinnacle, then to the mountain top.	Mt.4:5-8.
The devil first took Jesus to the mountain top, then to the pinnacle.	Lk.4:5-9.
Jesus begins his ministry after John's arrest.	Mk.1:13-14.
Jesus begins his ministry before John's arrest.	Jn.3:22-24.
Jesus cured Simon Peter's mother-in-law after he cleansed the leper.	Mt.8:1-15.
Jesus cured Simon Peter's mother-in-law before he cleansed the leper.	Mk.1:30-42; Lk.4:38, 5:13.
James and John were with Jesus when he healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law.	Mk.1:29-31.
James and John were not with Jesus when he healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law.	Lu.4:38-39; 5:10-11.
The people were not impressed with the feeding of the multitude.	Mk.6:52.

The people were very impressed with the feeding of the multitude.	Jn.6:14.
After the feeding of the multitude, Jesus went to Gennesaret.	Mk.6:53.
After the feeding of the multitude, Jesus went to Capernaum.	Jn.6:14-17.
Jesus cursed the fig tree so that it would not bear fruit.	Mk.11:14; Mt.21:19.
It wasn't time for the fig tree to bear fruit.	Mk.11:13.
The "Lord's Prayer" was taught to many during the "Sermon on the Mount".	Mt.6:9.
The "Lord's Prayer" was taught only to the disciples at another time.	Lu.11:1.
Jesus had his own house.	Mk.2:15.
Jesus did not have his own house.	Lu.9:58.
Divorce, except for unfaithfulness, is wrong.	Mt.5:32.
Divorce for any reason is wrong.	Mk.10:11-12.
Do not take sandals (shoes) or staves.	Mt.10:10.
Take only sandals (shoes) and staves.	Mk.6:8-9.
Jesus said, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees."	Lk.12:1.
Jesus said, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees."	Mt.16:6-11.
Jesus said, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod."	Mk.8:15.
Jesus heals two unnamed blind men.	Mt.20:29-30.
Jesus heals one named blind man.	Mk.10:46-52.
The cock crowed once.	Mt.26:74.
The cock crowed twice.	Mk.14:72.
Peter makes his first denial to a maid and some others.	Mt.26:69-70.
It was only to the maid.	Mk.14:66-68; Lk.22:56-57; Jn.18:17.
Peter's second denial was to another maid.	Mt.26:71-72.
It was to the same maid.	Mk.14:69-70.
It was to a man and not a maid.	Lk.22:58.
Jesus is given a scarlet robe.	Mt.27:28.

Jesus is given a purple robe.	Mk.15:17; Jn.19:2.
Jesus is given a gorgeous robe.	Lk.23:11.
Peter's third denial was to several bystanders.	Mt.26:73-74; Mk.14:69-70.
It was to one person.	Lk.22:59-60.
It was to a servant.	Jn.18:26-27.

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